

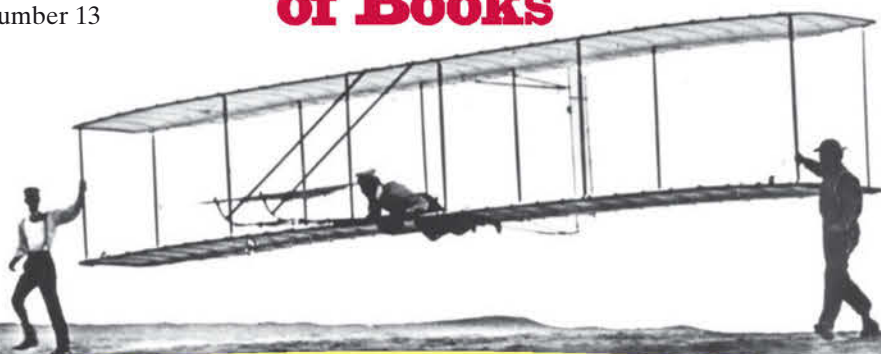


SUMMER ISSUE

Who Is Andrew Cuomo?
by Jim Dwyer

The New York Review **of Books**

August 13, 2015 / Volume LXII, Number 13



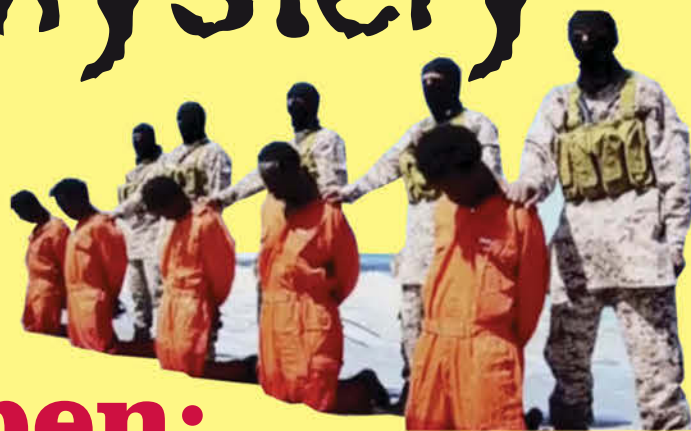
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Sue Halpern:
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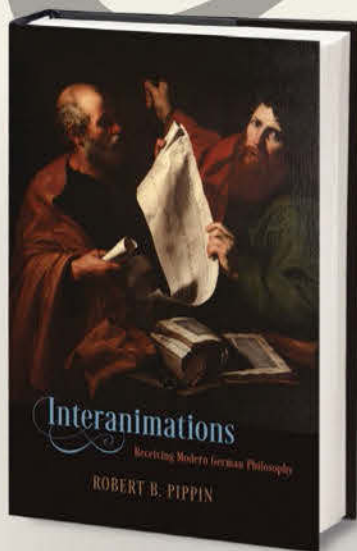
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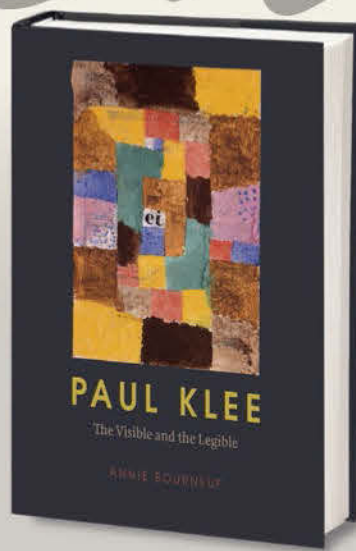
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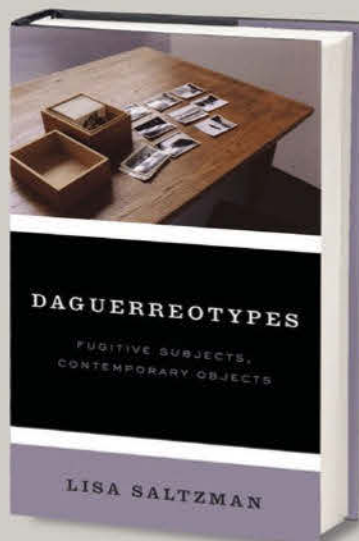
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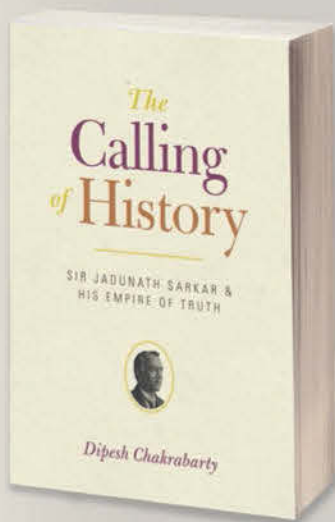
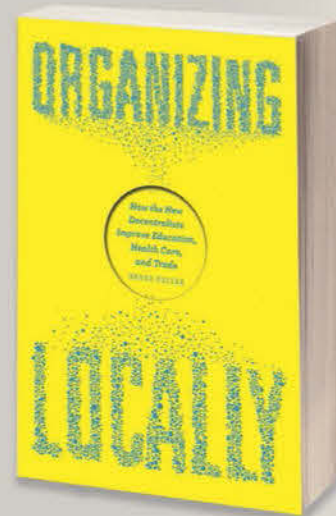
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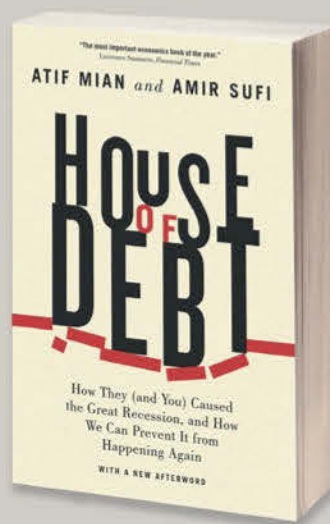


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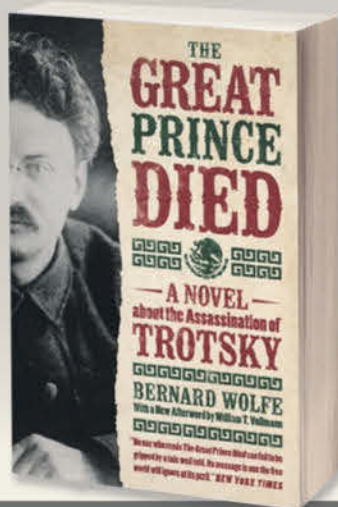
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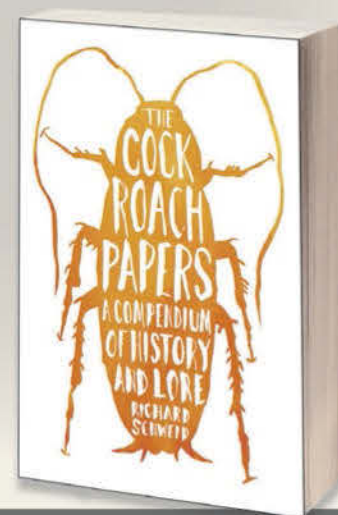
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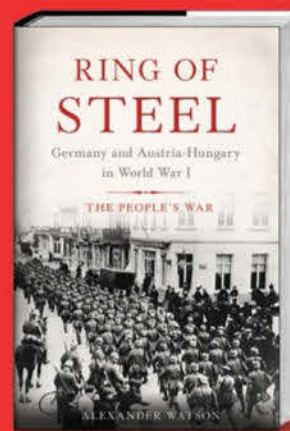
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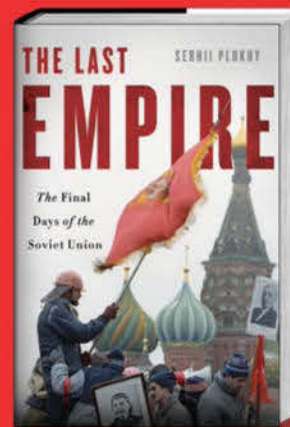
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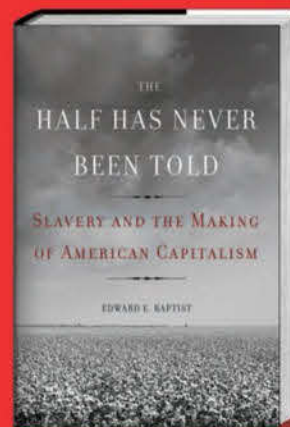
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BASIC BOOKS
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They Began a New Era

The Wright Brothers
by David McCullough.
Simon and Schuster,
320 pp., \$30.00

James Salter

The Wright brothers, Wilbur and Orville, come down to us in photographs as somewhat stiff, unromantic figures in dark jackets and white shirts, often with hats. They were not twins—Wilbur was four years older—but they were remarkably similar in their thinking and abilities. They worked and for the most part lived together all their lives, sober, intelligent, virtuous to a fault. Neither of them ever married, and the only woman in their lives seems to have been their younger sister, Katharine, who when she finally married so angered Orville—Wilbur was by that time dead—that he refused to go to her wedding. As for Wilbur, even during the days in Paris living at the Hotel Meurice he favored long, solitary walks admiring the architecture and public spaces, with many visits to the Louvre.

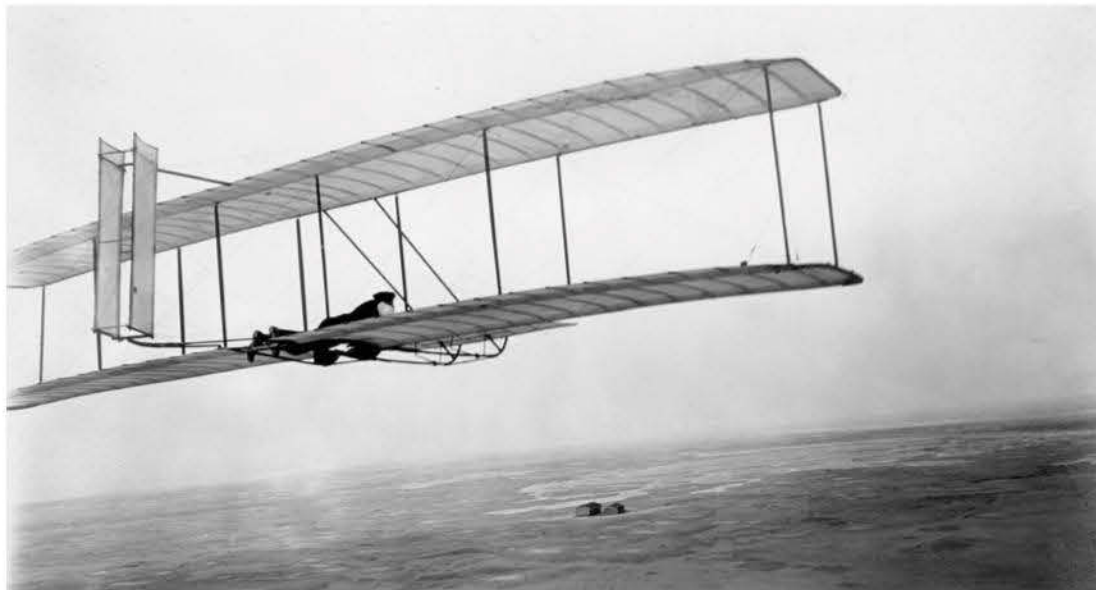
Their father, Bishop Milton Wright, was an itinerant churchman with high principles. The household in Dayton, Ohio, then a city of 40,000, was moral but not emphatically religious. All of them read. There seem to have been no family quarrels or divisions, and Bishop Wright talked freely to his children on all subjects, Orville said, except money-making, a matter to which he gave little consideration. “All the money anyone needs is just enough to prevent one from being a burden on others.”

Orville was the more enterprising. While still in high school he had started his own print shop and then a local newspaper in which Wilbur joined him. Together they opened a bicycle business in 1893, selling and repairing bicycles. It was soon a success, and they were able to move to a corner building where they had two floors, the upper one for the manufacturing of their own line of bicycles. Then late in the summer of 1896 Orville fell seriously ill with typhoid fever. His father was away at the time, and he lay for days in a delirium while Wilbur and Katharine nursed him. During the convalescence Wilbur read aloud to his brother about Otto Lilienthal, a famous German glider enthusiast who had just been killed in an accident.

Lilienthal was a German mining engineer who, starting with only a pair of birdlike wings, designed and flew a series of gliders—eighteen in all—and made more than two thousand flights in them to become the first true aviator. He held on to a connecting bar with his legs dangling free so they could be used in running or jumping and also in the air for balance. He took off by jumping from a building or escarpment or running down a man-made forty-five-foot hill, and he wrote ecstatically of the sensation of flying. Articles and photographs of him in the air were published widely. Icarus-like he fell fifty-five feet and was fatally injured, not when his wings fell off but when a gust of wind tilted him upward so that his glider

stalled. *Opfer müssen gebracht werden* were his final words, “sacrifices must be made.”

Reading about Lilienthal aroused a deep and long-held interest in Wilbur that his brother, when he had recovered, shared. They began to read intensively about birds and flying. It was a period when interest in flying did not need much to stimulate it. Alexander Graham Bell, Thomas Edison, Samuel Langley, and others were engaged by the possibility of flight. Wilbur wrote to the Smithsonian Institution expressing his interest in human flight and asking for whatever papers the Smithsonian had published as well as a list of other works in English on the subject.



Wilbur Wright flying his and Orville Wright's 1902 glider at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, with the brothers' camp and shed visible in the distance, 1903

When these were forwarded to him, the brothers began serious study of them. They had no experience, no formal technical training, and no funds, but as David McCullough writes in *The Wright Brothers*, a dream had taken hold. Having twice won both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize for his best-selling histories and biographies, McCullough is a much-loved dean of Americana, and his new book, a dual biography, has a warm appeal.

The Wrights' first aircraft, really a large kite, was made of bamboo and paper and had two wings, one over the other, with struts and crisscross wires connecting them. A system of control cords enabled its flight to be directed from the ground. Although they ended with a crash, the tests were successful, the brothers felt, and the following summer they built a full-sized glider with an eighteen-foot wingspan meant to be flown as a kite and, if that went well, to carry a man. Like any kite, this very large kite-glider needed wind to rise on, and Wilbur had written to Octave Chanute, an eminent engineer and a leading authority on aviation and gliders, asking for advice—they were looking for a location with good weather and reliable wind where they could conduct tests. Chanute suggested the coast of South Carolina or Georgia where there was also sand for soft landings. Poring through Weather Bureau records they became focused on a wide strip of land in the Outer Banks of North Carolina occupied only by fishermen, called Kitty Hawk. The winds there, they were informed, were

reliably steady at ten to twenty miles an hour.

Kitty Hawk was isolated and accessible only by boat. It was seven hundred miles from Dayton, most of it by train. Wilbur went first. It was September and still extremely hot. It took him four days to find a boatman who agreed to take him across Albemarle Sound and they ran into a storm. The voyage was only forty miles but it took them two days. Kitty Hawk, Wilbur saw, was comprised of not much more than a lonely stretch a mile wide and five miles long with a single small hill. There were some houses but almost no vegetation. To the east lay the open Atlantic.

Orville arrived two weeks later, and they set up camp in a tent. Conditions were primitive; there was not even water at first. They were not outdoors-

the pilot controlling it that the Wright brothers believed they could control flight and maintain balance.

Wilbur did the early flying. Down the sand slope headed into the wind they would trot the glider until it began to be airborne, and Wilbur would pull himself up onto the lower wing, take hold of the controls, and, with mooring lines still attached, briefly fly. By mid-October that year he was flying untethered three and four hundred feet.

They returned to Kitty Hawk the following year, 1901, and were discouraged by the results, as well as by a plague of mosquitoes. They had changed the camber of the wings in accordance with a shape that Lilienthal had concluded was optimal; but it turned out that their first glider had flown better. That fall, upstairs in the bicycle shop, they built a

six-foot-long wind tunnel, powered by a gas engine since the shop had no electricity. They tested at various angles and wind speeds some thirty-eight wing shapes made from hacksaw blades in order to have reliable figures for lift and drag, both of which change in flight with changes in angle and speed.

Equilibrium and control were a separate matter. Wilbur had explained it adroitly in a speech before a gathering of the Western Society of Engineers in Chicago. He had been invited to appear by Chanute and had reluctantly accepted. What was needed for a flying machine, he said, was balance and control in the air. He had taken a sheet of paper and holding it parallel

to the floor let it drop. Its erratic fall, turning over and slipping one way and the other, he compared to an untrained horse that men had to learn to manage if they were to fly, and “if you really wish to learn, you must mount a machine and become acquainted with its tricks by actual trial.”

Late the next fall, 1902, they came back to Kitty Hawk. They had built a new glider, larger than before, and were working eight and ten hours a day to do the final preparations, tacking and sewing on the fabric. They began flying it first as a glider, unmanned, and then, cautiously proceeding, piloted. Orville flew for the first time and also later crashed for the first time; the early accidents were not infrequent. “We hope to have repairs made in a few days,” Wilbur wrote.

Chanute came to visit for a week with an associate named Augustus Herring and a glider of their own that they wanted to test and that refused to fly. The weather turned wintry and the last of the men who had been helping (including their older brother Lorin Wright and George Spratt, a young enthusiast from Pennsylvania) departed. Late in October in a cold rain at dawn, the two brothers broke camp and walked the four miles to Kitty Hawk. During the two months they had been there they had made nearly a thousand flights and accomplished everything they had hoped. McCullough writes:

They knew exactly the importance of what they had accomplished. They knew they had solved the problem of flight and more. They had acquired the knowledge and

men, but the weeks and months they spent on Kitty Hawk with their glider were the happiest, they said, of their lives. Orville wrote:

Part of the time we eat hot biscuits and eggs and tomatoes; part of the time eggs and part tomatoes. Just now we are out of gasoline and coffee. Therefore no hot drink or bread or crackers. The order sent off Tuesday has been delayed by the winds. Will is “most starved.”

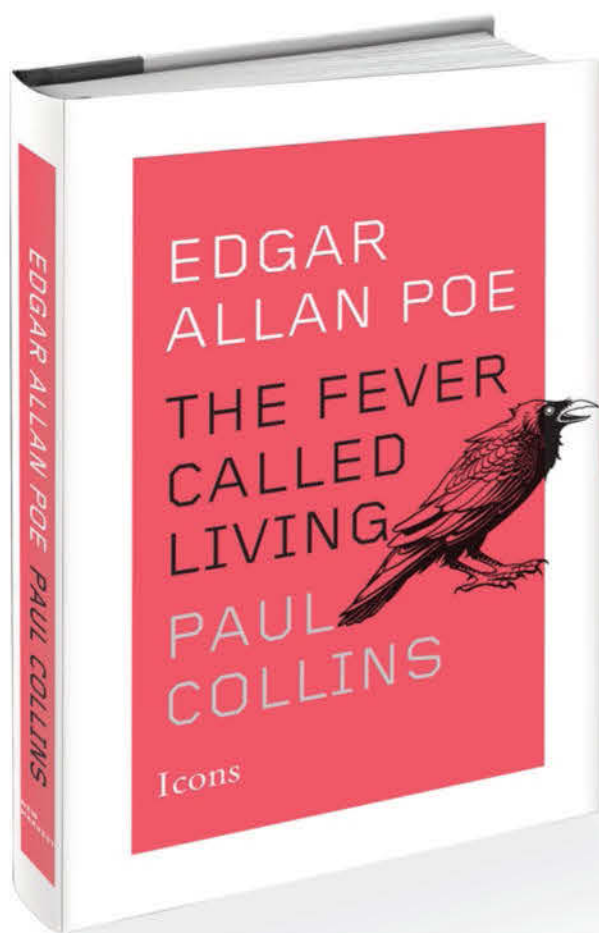
Into the fall, nights grew bitterly cold. There were storms. They had to hold the tent down in strong winds. They flew the glider like a kite when the wind was too strong, holding it down and testing control by the use of the cords. They had spent countless hours observing and analyzing bird flight at home, and they continued this at Kitty Hawk. A man on the island recalled:

They would watch the gannets and imitate the movements of their wings with their arms and hands. They could imitate every movement of the wings of those gannets; we thought they were crazy, but we just had to admire the way they could move their arms this way and that and bend their elbows and wrist bones up and down and which way, just like the gannets.

Birds have vaulted wings, that is to say they have camber. By slight movements at the tips of their wings they can change direction and attitude. And it was by warping the outer part of the wing of their glider slightly with

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POWERFUL LIVES. GLORIOUS READING.



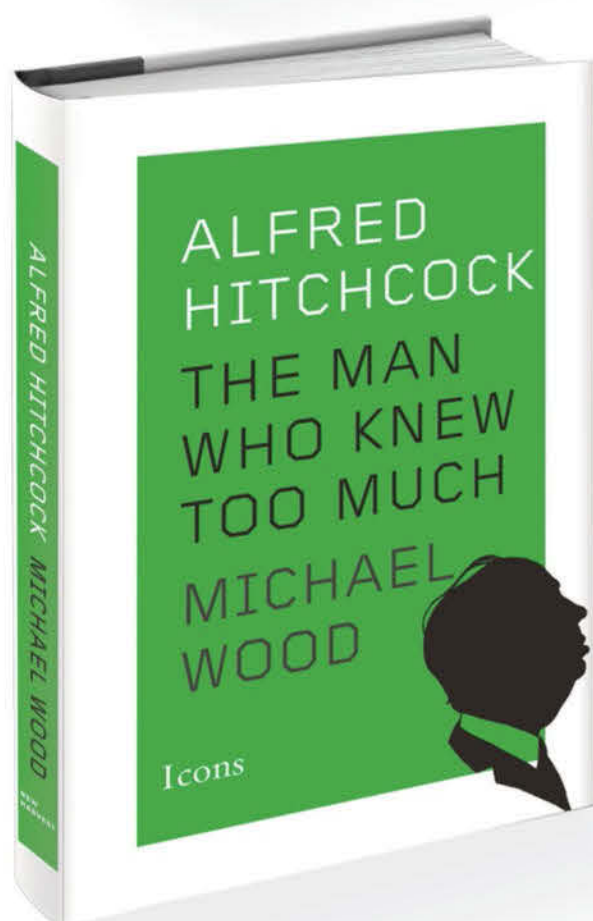
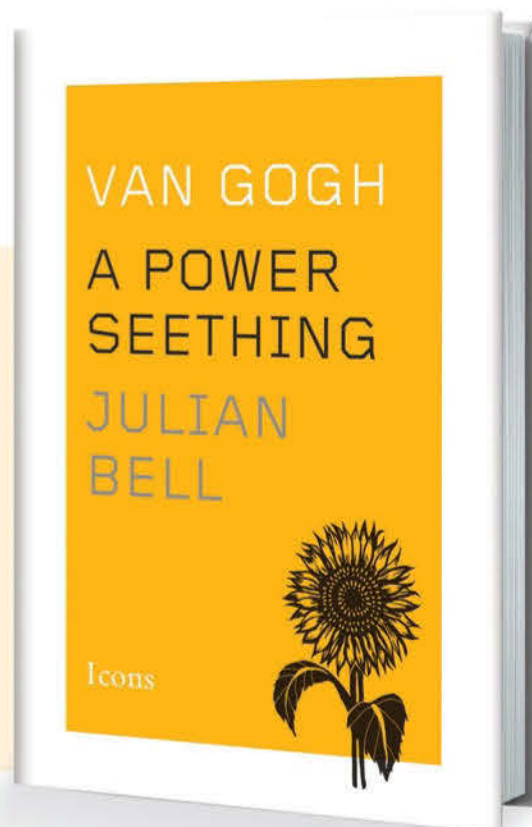
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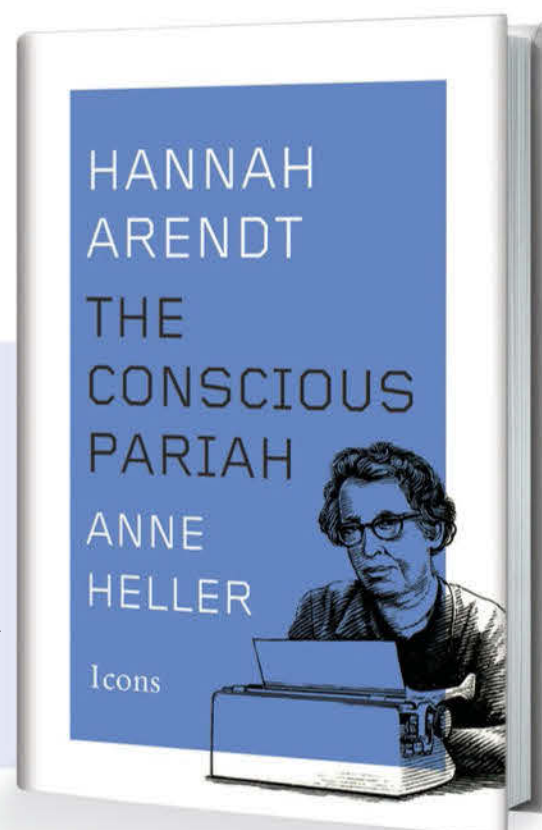
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the skill to fly. They could soar, they could float, they could dive and rise, circle and glide and land, all with assurance.

Now they had only to build a motor.

The engine they were now in a position to install was not to be found; all the ones they considered were too heavy. Their hired helper at the shop, a machinist named Charlie Taylor, solved the problem and built one from scratch, though he had little experience. It had four cylinders, a cast aluminum engine block, and weighed 152 pounds. The two eight-and-a-half-foot propellers were made of laminated wood, shaped by hand.

In late September 1903, they returned to Kitty Hawk. Their camp in a large shed had survived the storms of the previous winter, but they built a bigger one to house the aircraft they were now assembling. The next month, their main rival, Samuel Langley of the Smithsonian, for the second time saw his big, awkward-looking airplane with upward sloping wings dive straight into the Potomac after launch. "It seems to be our turn to throw now," Wilbur wrote to Chanute. But the weather turned cold and rainy. In November, snow fell. They were waiting for replacements for their new propeller shafts, which kept breaking.

The first real attempt to fly, with Wilbur at the controls, ended abruptly. He mishandled the plane and it kangarooed back to earth almost immediately, and it was three days before they hung a bedsheet on the side of the shed to signal for help from the nearby Life-Saving Station for another try.

It was Orville's turn this time, and in an icy wind, stronger than they would have liked, he started forward and at a speed hardly greater than a walk lifted up and—with the engine turning the propeller—flew unevenly for 120 feet. Later that day on a fourth try, Wilbur was able to fly a little over 850 feet. What was it like to fly that first airplane? There is an interactive simulation of it on the Internet at firstflight.open.ac.uk where you can fly it, or try to. There are several choices of speed as well as real speed with a gusting wind.

Surprisingly, there was little mention of the flight in the Dayton newspapers and the Associated Press turned the story down. The Norfolk paper, the *Virginian-Pilot*, published a grossly inaccurate account that was picked up by other papers including *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.

The telegram that was sent from the weather station read:

SUCCESSFOURFLIGHTSTHURSDAY MORNING ALL AGAINST TWENTY ONE MILE WIND STARTED FROM LEVEL WITH ENGINE POWER ALONE AVERAGE SPEED THROUGH AIR THIRTY ONE MILES LONGEST 57 SECONDS INFORM PRESS HOME FOR CHRISTMAS.

OREVELLE [*sic*] WRIGHT

The airplane they flew, the First Flyer, was wrecked when a sudden gust blew it end over end across the beach, breaking the wings. That spring in Dayton they built another and flew it from a big open field called Huffman Prairie

eight miles from town. It became their flying school. There they learned to master takeoffs and landings and maneuvering in flight, which was the most impressive thing. The flights themselves were not secret, anyone could come and watch, but no photographs were permitted. There was always the concern that what they had developed could be copied by others.

The government, to whom they offered the airplane first, turned them down with a virtual form letter expressing no interest. The British, however, sent an officer to investigate, and although he was only shown photographs of the plane in the air, he invited them to submit a sales proposal. The French were interested also and sent a delegation of military men in civilian clothes to Dayton. Their offer turned out to be a million francs, which was then \$200,000, for one airplane providing that it demonstrated it could achieve certain levels of altitude, range, and speed. They had not seen the airplane itself either, but only photographs and eyewitness testimony, and there was open skepticism in Paris, as this editorial suggests:

The Wrights have flown or they have not flown. They possess a machine or they do not possess one. They are in fact either fliers or liars. It is difficult to fly.... It is easy to say, "We have flown."

No contracts had been signed, there was nothing in hand but a new, more powerful version of the Flyer and the overtures of a New York firm called Flint & Company that had experience selling war materials in Europe. At the same time interest and impatience in Europe were growing hand in hand, increased by the achievements of some French aviators. Alberto Santos-Dumont had flown a contraption a distance of 726 feet before a thrilled public. The Wrights were confident their lead was solid in both their aircraft and their experience in the air. In response to the uneasiness of Flint & Company's European representative it was decided that one or both of the Wrights should come to Europe to back up the validity of their claims. Large amounts of money and sales were at stake.

In the end, Wilbur was chosen to go, and he sailed to Europe in May 1907 carrying only a single suitcase. Hart Berg, the Flint representative, recognized him on sight as he got off the train. Wright had "the peculiar glint of genius in his eye," he reported, "which left no doubt in my mind as to who he was." In Paris Wilbur was installed at the Hotel Meurice, then as now a palace. Negotiations with the French started almost immediately.

McCullough gives a sentimental, almost Baedeker portrait of Paris, in part from the letters home that Wilbur wrote. There is a kind of wistful quality to it, the long walks alone pleased by things he sees, his unexpected interest in art—paintings in the Louvre especially—admiration for the parks and outdoor cafés, the soul of the city enhanced by dining in fine restaurants as Berg's guest.

The meetings and negotiations were conducted in French and went on for months, always with the condition that everything was based on demonstration by flight. Things could proceed

only so far until the airplane arrived, and it was finally crated and shipped in July. Orville came to France almost immediately after.

The maiden flight, so to speak, was made only after months of further delays caused by lack of agreement with the French, during which the Wrights kept their remarkable equanimity, while rival pilots and their machines were achieving various degrees of success.

The promised demonstration for the French took place at a racetrack outside of Le Mans and was flown in a greatly reconstructed airplane, since the one that had been shipped was virtually wrecked in customs at Le Havre. An expectant crowd, mostly local, sat in the grandstand along with many reporters and correspondents. It was Au-



Orville and Wilbur Wright, circa 1906

gust 1908, almost four years and eight months since the historic first flight. At three in the afternoon the gleaming white airplane was rolled out of its shed, and so deliberate were Wilbur's preparations that it was after six before he quietly announced, "Gentlemen, I'm going to fly." He was calm and self-confident though he and his brother had been continually regarded as bluffers and frauds. Berg said afterward:

One thing that, to me at least, made his appearance all the more dramatic, was that he was not dressed as if about to do something daring or unusual. He, of course, had no special pilot's helmet or jacket, since no such garb yet existed, but appeared in the ordinary gray suit he usually wore, and a cap. And he had on, as he nearly always did when not in overalls, a high, starched collar.

He took off to cheers, then turned, and came flying back toward the crowd. He maneuvered gracefully, made several complete circles and ended by landing gently within yards of where he had started. He'd been in the air for a little less than two minutes. The crowd went wild. Louis Blériot, who was a flyer himself and present, was overwhelmed. So was France itself. There was immediate acclaim. Doubt about the Wrights' achievement vanished; people were aware that another era had begun.

Through the summer and fall Wilbur remained at Le Mans flying and taking passengers up with him, continually drawing crowds that came by car and special train, magnates and kings as well as people from all over Europe.

Orville had been almost fatally injured in an accident at Fort Myer, Virginia, where he was preparing for the flights that would demonstrate the airplane to the army. A piece of one of the propellers broke off, starting a vibration that caused a stay wire to come free and wrap itself around the blade. The plane went out of control, twisting one way and the other and then diving straight into the ground. The passenger, a lieutenant named Thomas Selfridge, died within hours. Orville lay in the hospital with a fractured leg and hip and broken ribs, nursed by his sister, who came as soon as she heard the news. It was six weeks until he could get out of bed and stand on crutches. Nevertheless, he and Katharine would sail to Europe to be with Wilbur, who met them at the station in Paris at 1:00 AM wearing a silk hat and evening clothes.

In Pau, a resort town in southwestern France where the winter might be milder, the flights continued. The airplane was four years old by then. It had been flown hard, survived crashes, and been many times patched and repaired. Still, Wilbur was making five and six flights a day, taking passengers up at no charge. The king of Spain came to Pau to see the machine, and the king of England. In Rome, later, the king of Italy and J.P. Morgan watched flights. Katharine was having the time of her life. She flew with her brother more than once. She had begun to take French lessons in Pau.

When they sailed home in May 1909, Wilbur had been in Europe for more than a year, and an astonishing fifteen factories in and around Paris were now building airplanes. As McCullough writes:

It was there, in France...that he had flown as no man ever had anywhere on earth. At Le Mans and Pau he had flown far more than anyone ever had and set every record for distance, speed, altitude, time in the air, and made the first flights ever with a passenger....

In the years that followed, their time was consumed by business affairs and a series of bitter lawsuits filed to protect their patents and reputations. After 1910, except for one short flight he made in Berlin, Wilbur never flew again. He was constantly traveling to New York or Washington or back to Europe on business when, "worn down in body and spirit," he fell ill and died of typhoid fever in 1912 at the age of forty-five.

Orville flew on for seven years; he then sold the Wright Company that he and his brother had established and set up his own aeronautical laboratory. He died in 1948.

He and Wilbur had really made their farewell years before, when they invited the Aeroplane Club of Dayton and their family and friends as well as anyone interested to come to Huffman Prairie. That day Orville put on a remarkable demonstration, making many maneuvers while flying low and also climbing to the unbelievable height of 2,720 feet. He and Wilbur had never flown together so that if there were ever a fatal accident it would not involve both of them, and one of them would live to continue the work. On that one occasion, they took off to fly together, with Orville at the controls, side by side. □

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The Man for Mars

Sue Halpern

Elon Musk: Tesla, SpaceX, and the Quest for a Fantastic Future

by Ashlee Vance.
Ecco, 392 pp., \$28.99

In 1989, an eighteen-year-old South African named Elon Musk approached a girl at a party in Canada, where he was attending college, and said, “I think a lot about electric cars. Do you think about electric cars?” That anecdote, one of scores that make up Ashlee Vance’s chatty, eponymous biography of the forty-four-year-old entrepreneur, is telling. Long before Musk parlayed the \$165 million he made for his part in developing the Internet banking giant PayPal into the more than \$11 billion that underwrite Musk Industries today, he was thinking ahead, envisioning a world that merged science with science fiction, a real world that he, the hero of this story, would bring to fruition.

In the decades since, Musk has built the world’s leading electric car company, Tesla Motors, beating Detroit at its own game: in November 2012, the Tesla Model S, a seven-seat sedan that sold for as much as \$100,000, was named *Motor Trend* magazine’s car of the year. At the same time, Musk founded, funded, and runs the aeronautics company SpaceX, and he conceived and is the board chairman of SolarCity, “the country’s premier solar services company.”

Though they are distinct businesses, run independently, the three are connected, in ways big and small. Tesla cars are sold with the guarantee of free fuel in the form of solar energy from charging stations powered by solar panels supplied by SolarCity. And the lithium-ion battery technology that allows a Tesla car to go from zero to sixty miles per hour in less than five seconds and travel three hundred miles on a single charge was instrumental in solving one of solar power’s biggest obstacles—its unreliability due to cloudy days, the dark of night, and latitude. This past spring, Tesla unveiled a stylish, compact, affordable home battery called Powerwall that stores the sun’s energy and kicks in when the solar panels are unproductive. “Our goal here is to fundamentally change the way the world uses energy,” Musk declared at the product launch. “The goal is complete transformation of the entire energy infrastructure of the world.” (Another synergy, reported by Bloomberg: the Powerwall battery will be available in colors “similar to the paint used for Tesla’s Model S sedan.”)

An even more significant connection is this: while Musk is working to move people away from fossil fuels, betting that the transition to electric vehicles and solar energy will contain the worst effects of global climate change, he is hedging that bet with one that is even more wishful and quixotic. In the event that those terrestrial solutions don’t pan out and civilization is imperiled, Musk is positioning SpaceX to establish a human colony on Mars. As its website explains:

SpaceX was founded under the belief that a future where humanity is out exploring the stars is funda-

Elon Musk



mentally more exciting than one where we are not. Today SpaceX is actively developing the technologies to make this possible, with the ultimate goal of enabling human life on Mars.

“The key thing for me,” Musk told a reporter for *The Guardian* in 2013,

is to develop the technology to transport large numbers of people and cargo to Mars.... There’s no rush in the sense that humanity’s doom is imminent; I don’t think the end is nigh. But I do think we face some small risk of calamitous events. It’s sort of like why you buy car or life insurance. It’s not because you think you’ll die tomorrow, but because you might.

To be clear, Musk is not envisioning a colony of a few hundred settlers on the Red Planet, but one on the order of Hawthorne, California, the 80,000-plus industrial city outside of Los Angeles where SpaceX has its headquarters.

Until Elon Musk and his billion or so dollars came along around the turn of the century, space exploration in the United States had largely stalled. Musk recalls checking the NASA website for the space agency’s schedule for a Mars mission, not finding one, and assuming he was simply looking in the wrong place. When he realized he wasn’t, and that the government was unlikely to fund such a project, he decided to take it on himself. As he told *Wired*’s Chris Anderson a decade later, in 2012:

I started with a crazy idea to spur the national will. I called it the Mars Oasis missions. The idea was to send a small greenhouse to the surface of Mars, packed with dehydrated nutrient gel that could be hydrated on landing. You’d wind up with this great photograph of green plants and red background—the first life on Mars, as far as we know, and the farthest that life’s ever traveled. It would be a great money shot, plus you’d get a lot of engineering data about what it takes to maintain a little greenhouse and keep plants alive on Mars. If I could afford it, I figured it would be a worthy expenditure of money, with no expectation of financial return.

Musk, it should be noted, had no experience building rockets. All he knew about space exploration had been gleaned from books and training manuals. Vance describes in gleeful detail Musk’s improbable quest to build a NASA-worthy rocket essentially from scratch. “I am a billionaire. I am going to start a space program,” Vance reports him saying to the man he enlisted to go with him to Moscow to persuade the Russians to sell him an intercontinental ballistic rocket, which he planned to use as a launch vehicle. When that didn’t work out—Musk thought the Russians were trying to get him to part with too many millions of his billion-plus fortune—he crunched some numbers and determined that it made more sense to build the rocket himself. It would be low-cost, low-orbiting, and designed to ferry satel-

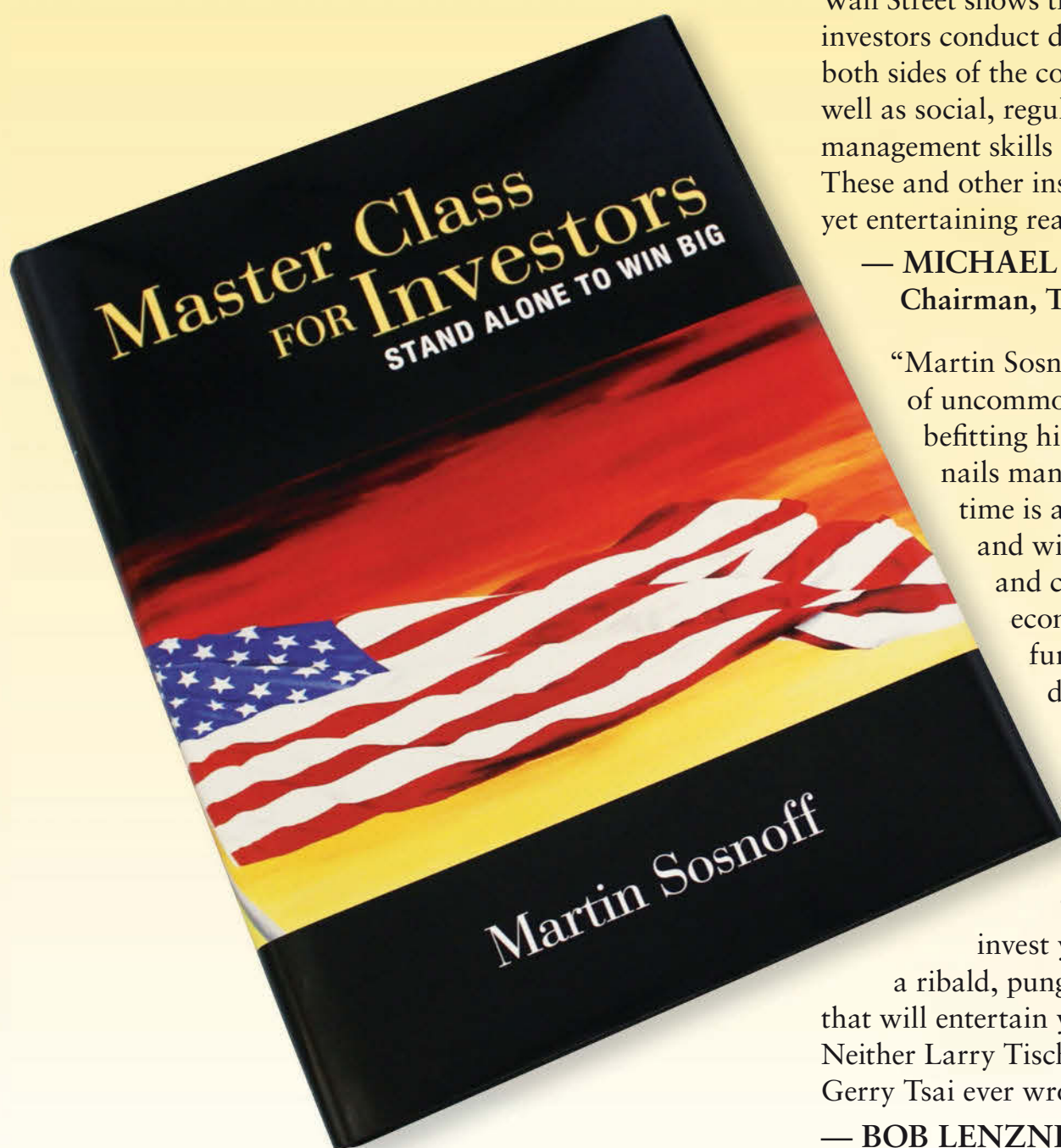
lites into space on a regular schedule. The idea, he told the first employees of his new company, Space Exploration Technologies (SpaceX), was to become the “Southwest Airlines of Space.”

As a private company, SpaceX could operate lean, absent the bloated bureaucracies and cost overruns of government contractors like Boeing and Lockheed Martin. It would embody the spirit of a Silicon Valley start-up—learn by doing and do it around the clock—and like those start-ups, it would take advantage of exponential increases in computing power. Software developers would tap into that power to design and build the company’s avionics, while the rocket’s components would be assembled, as much as possible, from equipment purchased off the shelf. But when suppliers couldn’t deliver a product fast enough, or when it didn’t meet Musk’s standards, he would declare that SpaceX could make the same part quicker, better, and cheaper. And then, invariably, because of Musk’s relentless and successful pursuit of the best young engineers and coders and the unrelenting demands he placed upon them, it would be made. Before long, in-house development became an integral part of the SpaceX mission, vital to keeping costs low enough to make a private enterprise space program workable.

What was not workable was the schedule Musk set when he announced the creation of the company in 2002—a first rocket launch fifteen months later, and a Mars expedition seven years after that. It took more than four years for SpaceX to send its first rocket aloft, in March 2006; it fell to earth and crashed in less than half a minute. To get even that far, the SpaceX team had had to design, manufacture, and assemble the rocket’s engine, its fuselage, and the avionics software that was driving the whole operation. They were also tasked with building a launch pad and control tower on Kwajalein, a remote atoll in the Marshall Islands.

After the failure of the first rocket, it took a full year to analyze what went wrong, correct for it, construct a new spacecraft, and send it skyward. Though this one flew longer than the first, it, too, fell back to earth. The company was burning through Musk’s money; its margin for error was narrowing while Musk’s reputation as yet another rich guy with a vanity space program was growing. Finally, in 2008, six years after Musk declared his galactic intentions, and four and a half years after he said it would happen, the SpaceX Falcon 1 became the first privately constructed rocket to reach orbit. As Vance tells it, the human costs were at least as high as whatever number of dollars had come from Musk’s pocket (one estimate put it at \$100 million):

Some of these people had spent years on the island going through one of the more surreal engineering exercises in human history. They had been separated from their families, assaulted by the heat, and exiled on their tiny launchpad outpost—sometimes without much food—for days on end as they



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waited for the launch windows to open and dealt with the aborts that followed. So much of that pain and suffering and fear would be forgotten if this launch went successfully.

Maybe. Possibly. Probably not. The portrait of Elon Musk that emerges from these pages is of a man of visionary intellect, fierce ambition, and fantastic wealth, who is emotionally bankrupt. “Many of us worked tirelessly for him for years and were tossed to the curb like a piece of litter,” one former employee told Ashlee Vance. “What was clear is that people who worked for him were like ammunition: used for a specific purpose until exhausted and discarded.”

Vance tells the story of Mary Beth Brown, Musk’s longtime personal assistant and one of the first SpaceX hires—the woman who scheduled his meetings, picked out his clothes, did public relations, ran interference, and made executive decisions, logging twenty-hour days when necessary—who lost her job when she asked for a raise:

Musk [told her, when she asked for more money] that Brown should take a couple of weeks off, and he would take on her duties and gauge how hard they were. When Brown returned, Musk let her know he didn’t need her anymore....

So it went for many of Musk’s most devoted employees. Loyalty was expected but not honored. Fear of getting publicly dressed down by Musk—or worse—was rampant. “Marketing people who made grammatical mistakes in e-mails were let go,” Vance reports, “as were other people who hadn’t done anything ‘awesome’ in recent memory.” And then there was the employee who “missed an event to witness the birth of his child. Musk fired off an e-mail saying, ‘That is no excuse. I am extremely disappointed. You need to figure out where your priorities are. We’re changing the world and changing history, and you either commit or you don’t.’”

Musk’s severe rationality and emotional detachment, as well as his preternatural ability to master complex subjects quickly, have led to an ongoing joke among denizens of certain Internet forums that he must be an alien, beamed down from space. (No wonder he’s so keen to colonize Mars!) In fact, the man has all the attributes of a classic narcissist—the grandiosity, the quest to be famous, the lack of empathy, the belief that he is smarter than everyone else, and the messianic plan to save civilization. Steve Jobs comes to mind, though Jobs’s ambitions were pedestrian compared to Musk’s. Still, by now the fabulously wealthy, fabulously self-justifying Silicon Valley CEO has become a familiar figure. It’s as if inhumane behavior were a necessary and expected part of the tech narrative. Without it, the story loses its frisson. Would a biography like this be half as thrilling if its protagonist were not a colossal jerk?

This is not to deny that the achievements of Musk Industries have been considerable. Tesla Motors produces cars that have shown the viability of long-distance electric vehicles. Combine that with SolarCity’s ever-expanding solarization of the energy grid and suddenly a post-carbon future

that does not require a diminution of our standard of living seems within reach. While being able to maintain a relatively upscale lifestyle in the absence of fossil fuels may sound frivolous, it performs the psychological trick that has so far eluded environmentalists, that of making a fossil-free world sound appealing and familiar and not reflexively scary.

Though so far Tesla cars are only available to the monied few, the cars, as proof of a concept, have had an impact beyond their numbers, not only because they have been so well received by both consumers and the automobile industry, but because they have inspired other car manufacturers to move toward electric power. Twelve electric vehicles besides the Tesla Model S were brought to market in 2014 and fourteen



Elon Musk unveiling SpaceX’s Dragon V2 spacecraft, designed to carry astronauts into space, Hawthorne, California, May 2014

were released in 2015. One of them was conceived and designed in Croatia. If any of these companies can make an affordable, long-distance electric car, then electric vehicles could, in the not too distant future, become the new normal, relegating the internal combustion engine, with its pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, to the junk heap of history. Musk himself promises such a car within two years.

Similarly, Musk’s Powerwall is another proof of concept. It may not change the way electricity is generated, at least not in developed countries with existing infrastructure, but it does make going off the grid more feasible and affordable. In developing nations, it has the potential to offer electrification without the monetary and health costs of constructing coal-fired power plants or large-scale dam projects. Right now, the large factory Musk is building in Nevada to produce these batteries cannot keep up with demand. This is a good sign, and not just for Musk. Given the opportunity to switch to renewable energy, consumers are taking it.

This is how markets are supposed to work. Last year Musk did an about-face and made all of Tesla’s automobile patents open-source, available to anyone to use “in good faith,” in an effort to spur more electric vehicle development. But even if he is not directly inviting competitors, other manufacturers are following Musk’s lead. Shortly after Musk launched the Powerwall, Daimler, the parent company of Mercedes-Benz, announced its own wall-mounted home battery pack. This

was no coincidence. In 2009, Daimler bought a 10 percent stake in Tesla, and Tesla, which already had provided battery packs for a fleet of Mercedes A Class cars, agreed to make them for Daimler’s Smart cars, too.

SpaceX, which is the first private company to deliver supplies to the International Space Station, and which in 2017 plans to bring astronauts there, has inspired aerospace giant Airbus to develop its own reusable launch vehicle similar to a SpaceX system now being tested that would make spacecrafts more like airplanes. (SpaceX was able to land one of its Falcon rockets on water in 2014 and is getting close to being able to guide one down to the launch pad. However, a major setback occurred on June 28 when a Falcon 9 rocket bound for the International

While SpaceX’s four thousand circling satellites have the potential to create a whole new meaning for the World Wide Web, since they will beam down the Internet to every corner of the earth, the system holds additional interest for Musk. “Mars is going to need a global communications system, too,” he apparently told a group of engineers he was hoping to recruit at an event last January in Redmond, Washington. “A lot of what we do developing Earth-based communications can be leveraged for Mars as well, as crazy as that may sound.”

And then—talk about crazy—there is the hyperloop, a super-fast transportation system (San Francisco to Los Angeles in thirty minutes at more than seven hundred miles per hour) in which passengers travel in pods through something like pneumatic tubes that Musk has described as “a cross between a Concorde, a railgun and an air hockey table.” He started imagining this “fifth mode of transportation,” he said, in response to a plan by the California Department of Transportation to build a bullet train that, by his estimation, would be one of the most expensive and slowest fast trains in the world. Musk’s idea was to

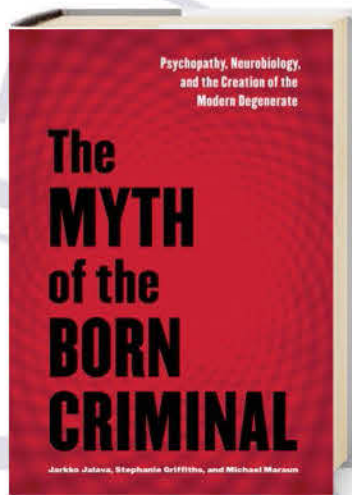
mount an electric compressor fan on the nose of the pod that actively transfers high pressure air from the front to the rear of the vessel. This is like having a pump in the head of the syringe actively relieving pressure.

Because, he said, he was too busy making rockets and electric cars, he released his technical paper, “Hyperloop Alpha,” to the public, hoping that others would pursue it.

They have. There are at least two groups with similar names, Hyperloop Technologies and Hyperloop Transportation Technologies, the first with a roster of Silicon Valley venture capital all-stars, the other raising money by crowdsourcing, who have set up shop—both in Los Angeles—and are working on the hyperloop in earnest. In recent months, Musk has jumped back on board, pledging to build a test track adjacent to SpaceX, and announcing a contest, open to students and independent engineering teams, to design and construct prototypes of the system’s passenger pods. They will be put to the test next summer. So far over seven hundred contestants have entered.

Musk’s critics—and he has many—are quick to point out that he is merely piggy-backing on existing technologies, not inventing them. There were electric cars before there was Tesla, rockets before there was SpaceX, solar panels before there was SolarCity, and even pneumatic tube travel has a long, if spotty, history. Yet as true as this is, it misses the point of what Elon Musk is doing. By now it is a cliché to put the words “Silicon Valley” and “disruptive innovation” in the same sentence, but disruption is precisely the point of every one of Musk’s ventures. He has made disruption itself his business plan and it is working. It required a lot of hubris to take on the aerospace industry and the automobile industry and the utilities, but he did, and he is, with precipitous consequences. Will they be precipitous enough to catapult the man to Mars, ten years hence? □

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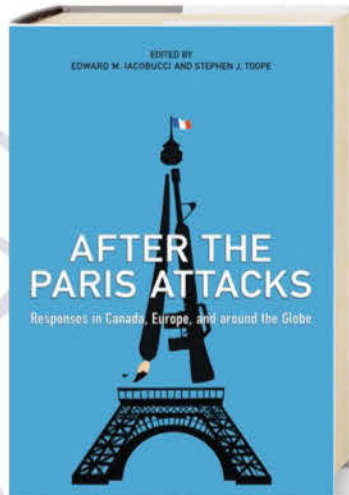


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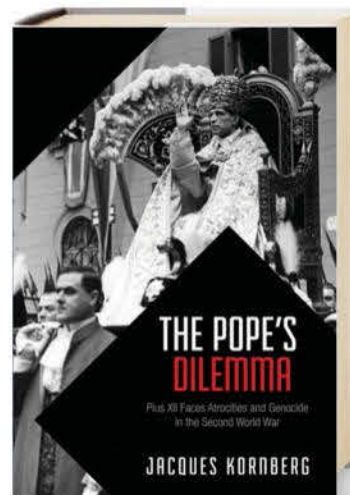


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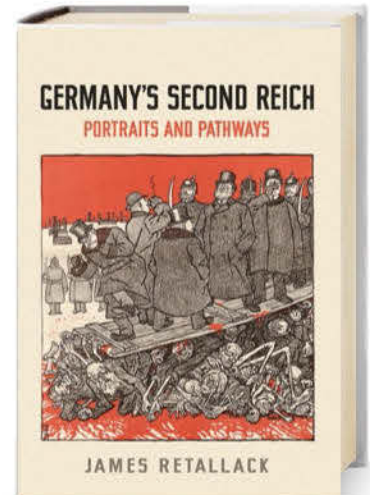


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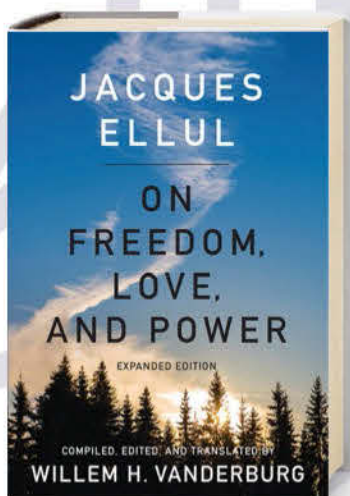


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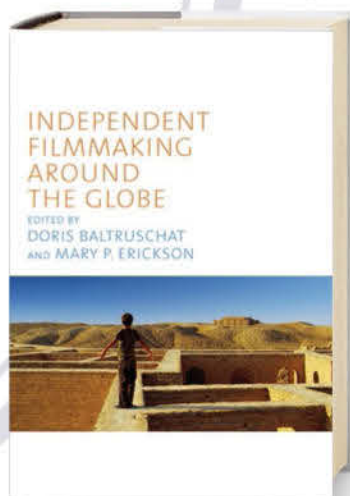


On Freedom, Love, and Power

Expanded Edition

by Jacques Ellul
edited by Willem H. Vanderburg

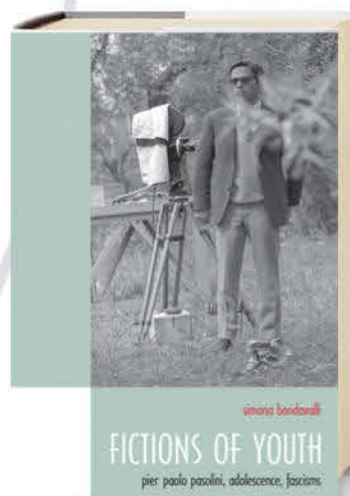
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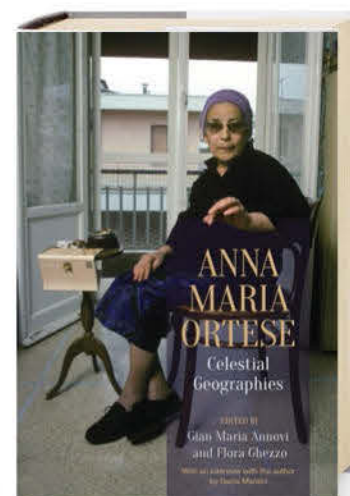


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Advancing Knowledge

The Grandest Art of the Ancients

Ingrid D. Rowland

Power and Pathos:

Bronze Sculpture of the Hellenistic World

an exhibition at Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, March 14–June 21, 2015; the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, July 28–November 1, 2015; and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., December 13, 2015–March 20, 2016. Catalog of the exhibition edited by Jens M. Daehner and Kenneth Lapatin. Getty Publications, 368 pp., \$65.00

Piccoli Grandi Bronzi

an exhibition at the National Archaeological Museum, Florence, March 20–August 31, 2015. Catalog of the exhibition edited by Barbara Arheid and Mario Iozzo. Florence: Edizioni Polistampa, 234 pp., €34.00 (paper)

Serial Classic

an exhibition at the Fondazione Prada, Milan, May 9–August 24, 2015

Portable Classic

an exhibition at the Fondazione Prada, Ca' Corner della Regina, Venice, May 9–September 13, 2015

Serial/Portable Classic:

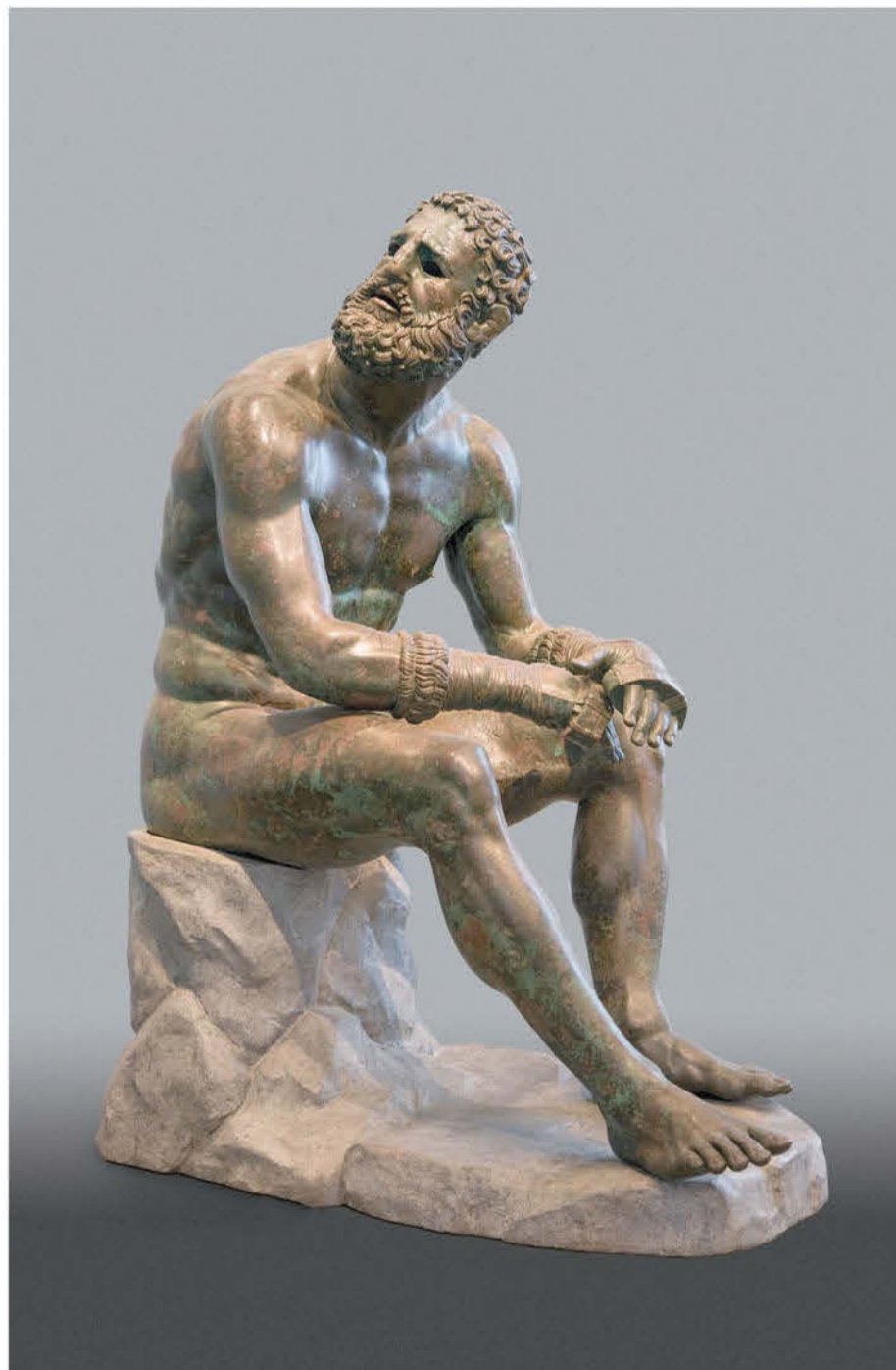
The Greek Canon and Its Mutations

catalog of the exhibitions at the Fondazione Prada, Milan, and Palazzo Corner, Venice, edited by Salvatore Settis with Anna Anguissola and Davide Gasparotto. Fondazione Prada, 387 pp., €70.00

While excavating on Rome's Quirinal Hill in 1885, archaeologist Rodolfo Lanciani discovered a pair of bronze statues by Greek sculptors that seemed to greet their release from oblivion with fully human bemusement. One, from the third to second century BC, was a nude male of gilded bronze, larger than life, casually leaning on his long spear with a grace that makes the weapon look like a scepter. Robust and muscular, young but no longer youthful, he poses with surprising lightness, a coiled spring of energy, with a shock of wiry hair and a stubble beard to signal his exuberant virility. Yet his eyes are wary under his prominent brow; what drives this body, stripped of every trapping except a coat of gold leaf, is pure mind. Clearly one of those Greek rulers who traced their line back to the gods, he is practically a god himself.

The other statue, from the third century BC, a life-sized seated boxer, could not have been more poignantly human. Lanciani photographed him sitting on the ground, watching over the excavation, looking more like a companion or mascot for the workers than a masterpiece of ancient sculpture.

The boxer came to rest this summer at the center of an exhibition in Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, where he has been set so close to the ground that we can look directly into his face, and see what Lanciani's workmen saw in 1885: the scars of survival. This man, too, has a heroic, muscular body, but his hands are swollen beneath the protective leather straps and leather padding that Greek boxers used for official matches



'Statue of a Seated Boxer (Terme Boxer),' bronze with copper inlays, third century BC

(they practiced with gloves), and his face has been brutally battered.

The broken nose and cauliflower ears suggest a long series of previous fights, but the sculptor also makes it clear that the latest bout has finished only a moment ago by using a chisel to jab new cuts into the skin of the boxer's face, uppermost ear, and arms. A purple patch of bronze appliqué creates the rising bruise on his cheekbone. Copper alloy suggests the red of fresh blood, oozing from a cut on his ear and splashed on his thigh as he turns his injured head to look upward, meeting our eyes head on.

The boxer's hair and beard are spiky with sweat, and his parted lips, shrunk inward over toothless gums, suggest that he is panting with exhaustion. His genitals are bound by a *kynodesme*, the ancient Greek equivalent of a jockstrap. He once had inlaid eyes, but all we see now are empty sockets, surrounded by surprisingly luxuriant metallic lashes. It is the endless depth of those sightless eyes that drives home the distance between his suffering and the feelings he evokes in us. Is that suffering face, with its unique pattern of damage done, a mask to cover his intimate self or the true image of his soul? Was it the soul

of a poet or a brute? Are we meant to admire his endurance, or pity his bleeding fragility? Is his story a grim tale of abuse and violence, or has he suffered to some purpose? Some of these questions can be answered, at least tentatively, but in the end the sculptor's artistry ensures that we can only look down into those empty eyes and feel compassion for the human being before us. He must have been a champion, but he won that distinction at a tragic price.

A tour de force of bronze work, the boxer shows why that medium was so prized in the ancient world. The precious metal could be cast to impressive dimensions, in daring poses, and burnished to a tawny sheen that suggested living skin or animal fur. Under the right conditions (which include being immersed in water), bronze sculpture can last for millennia, but it can also be melted down to make coins, armor, or weapons, and often was. Of the thousands of large-scale bronzes the ancient world produced, only a few hundred survive, along with great numbers of miniatures, some replicas of the great bronze masterpieces, some original creations.

Among the ancient world's most famous bronzes there were images of gods, like the colossal Athena Promachos who guarded the Athenian Acropolis (the glint of her spear could be seen from Cape Sounion, more than fifty kilometers distant), an early work of the great Pheidias, designer and master sculptor of the Parthenon, and the still-larger statue of Apollo known as the Colossus of Rhodes. But bronze, with its warm sheen and its flexibility, lent itself above all to the portrayal of human beings, notably the victorious athletes who won at the Olympics and the Pythian Games of Delphi (where the beautiful statue of a charioteer still survives).

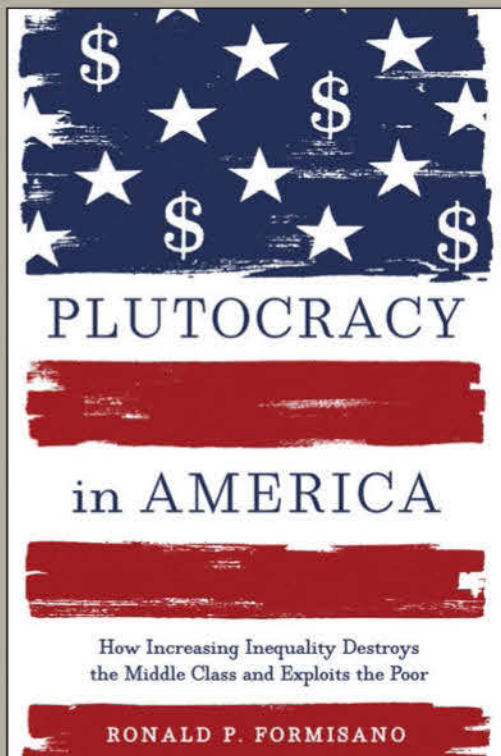
The weary Greek boxer, then, is almost certainly shown at his moment of supreme triumph, when he will finally be able to hang up the leather-and-sheepskin *himantes oxeis* covering his hands, the "sharp straps," once and for all. He may well have paid for this monument himself—Olympic boxing, for all its bloody immediacy, was still an aristocratic sport.* The Italian classicist Paolo Moreno has even suggested a name for this long-suffering spirit: Mys, a boxer from the Spartan colony of Taras (modern Taranto), who finally won his Olympic victory in 336 BC, at the age of forty, and thus became a byword for brave persistence. We may be meant to read this ravaged face in a Sophoclean key, like Herakles in the tragedy *Philoketes*:

*And first I will tell you of my misfortunes,
Of all that I suffered—and by going through those sufferings
I obtained deathless virtue, as you can see.
And you, know it well, must endure all this,
To create a glorious life from your pain.*

An Olympic champion in the classical period would never have chosen to show himself in such graphic, painful mortality, but by the time of Mys of Taras, a contemporary of Aristotle (twenty years older than Mys) and Alexander the Great (twenty years younger), signs of vulnerable humanity, like the heroic ruler's furrowed brow and the boxer's wounds, had entered the repertoire of Greek sculpture. Even godlike Alexander's portraits emphasize his cowlick and unruly hair as well as his large, sparkling eyes. This is the period that classicists call "Hellenistic" rather than "Hellenic," inspired by a concept of Greekness that could be, and was, exported from Egypt to Afghanistan, creating wondrous cosmopolitan cities like Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome. Born of this broader, sophisticated world, Hellenistic artists—working

*Roman boxers, on the other hand, wore blades in their gloves and were professional blood sportsmen, the equivalent of gladiators. Virgil's *Aeneid*, book 5, recounts the boxing match between Dares and Entellus, who opt, as heroes should, for Greek *himantes* rather than Roman gloves.

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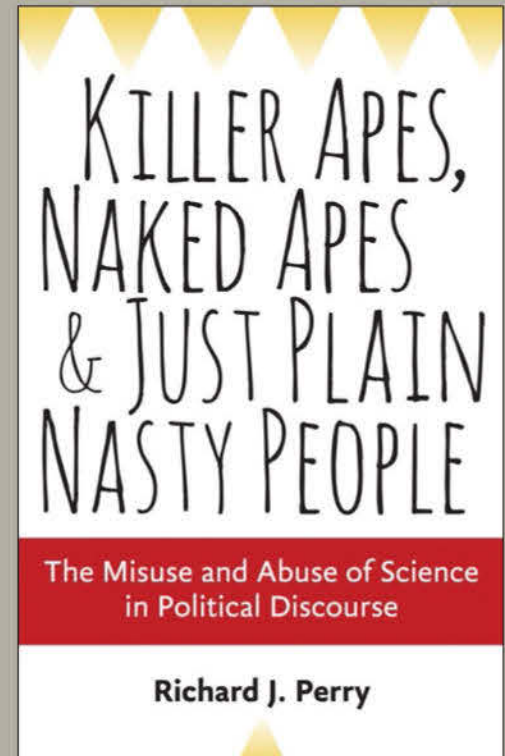
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from the late fourth century to the late first century BC—reveled in curiosity about that world's disparate peoples, about strange creatures of myth and nature, and about the mystery of individuality itself. They also, as the boxer shows by example, paid extraordinary homage to the value of work. And no wonder. The sculptor Lysippos, born in 390 BC, claimed to have created more than 1,500 bronze statues in the course of his illustrious career.

It is Lysippos, appropriately enough, who opens Palazzo Strozzi's exhibition of Hellenistic bronzes, "Power and Pathos," with a signed marble pedestal from Corinth, one of the ancient world's most bustling ports (the exhibition will travel to the Getty Museum in Los Angeles this summer and fall, and then to the National Gallery in Washington, D.C.). The statue itself is missing, as are all the master's original works. We know them largely from copies made for Roman collectors of the imperial era, that is, for people who lived more than four hundred years after Lysippos downed his tools for the last time in around 300 BC.

According to ancient writers like Pliny the Elder, the admiral, collector, and efficiency expert who died investigating the eruption of Vesuvius, Lysippos worked both in metal and in marble, although the two media required two radically different techniques. Carving marble is an art of subtraction. Michelangelo once described it as releasing a figure from its sheath of stone. A sculptor in metal, on the other hand, performs nearly the opposite action, building up his figure from the inside out, using soft materials like clay and wood, before embedding it in a mold of clay or plaster.

The mold, in turn (or a mold of the mold), will be filled with molten metal to make either a solid cast or, more practically, a hollow shell. Bronzes, therefore, always take their shape at one remove from the sculptor's hand, and because molds themselves can be reproduced, metal statues can be cast in multiples. After casting, however, the sculptors picked up rasp and chisel for final detailing, carving and scoring the metal as if they were working marble, adding inlays of metal, ivory, bone, and stone for eyes, lips, teeth, skin, hair. As a result, no two versions of an individual work are ever completely alike, even if they emerged at the same time from the same workshop.

The exhibition makes this point with two herms, stylized statues of Dionysus, one found in a shipwreck off Mahdia, Tunisia, in 1907, and one that appeared suddenly on the Swiss art market in the 1970s and is now housed in the Getty Museum. The alloy used to cast these fine bronzes is virtually identical; they must have been cast in the same pouring, in the same workshop. The Mahdia bronze, however, is much more finely finished than its twin (despite its more ravaged condition): the god's turban falls more jauntily, and the surface of the bronze has been carefully smoothed and inscribed with the signature of the master, Boëthos of Kalchedon. The other herm, more simply tooled and with a less luxuriant turban, must be the work of an assistant. The shop itself was probably located on the island of Rhodes in the time of Hadrian (reigned 117–138), the well-

traveled, cultured Roman emperor who did so much to knit together his disparate empire.

As the boxer shows, with the red inlay of his lips and blood, his purple bruise and copper nipples, the metal statues of the Hellenistic world could flash almost as many hues as our own "colorized" bronzes, all the while displaying the quality the ancient Greeks prized most in art: *aglaia*, shiny brightness, the glitter of the gods. The same richness of color animates the first statue to greet us in the exhibition: the late-second-century-BC Etruscan bronze known as the Arringatore, the Orator, with his rosy lips and varie-

before the Arringatore was discovered. The sculptor of *David* would have appreciated how the sculptor of Aule Meteli employed the same trick: exaggerating the size of the figure's hands, both because they will be seen from below and because they carry such a weight of significance.

The National Archaeological Museum of Florence, which loaned Aule Meteli to Palazzo Strozzi, used his absence as an opportunity to mount an exhibition of its own, "Piccoli Grandi Bronzi," devoted to exquisite small bronzes, both ancient and Renaissance, from the Medici collection. For reasons of space, most of these pieces

peror Augustus in profile as an ethereal Apollo, his patron deity.

As Florence reveled in Hellenistic bronzes great and small, the Prada Foundation of Milan unveiled its own paired exhibitions of classical sculpture in two settings—the new Prada Foundation complex on the outskirts of Milan, and Ca' Corner della Regina in the heart of Venice—both curated by Salvatore Settis, Anna Anguissola, and Davide Gasparotti, in venues designed by the Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas. Rather than compete with the exhibitions in Florence, these two shows provide a complement on many different levels and think in many of the same terms. Both James Bradburne in Florence and Rem Koolhaas in Milan decided to display sculptures at ground level rather than raised on pedestals; only so can we look down into the poignant face of the boxer or come eye-to-eye with a terrifying modern reproduction of Warrior A from Riace.

In Milan, the show titled "Serial Classic" explores the ways in which ancient artists created multiple versions of a single work, either at the moment of production or centuries later. In Venice, a complementary exhibition called "Portable Classic" shows how sculptors, both ancient and early modern, reproduced large works of art in miniature, most dramatically by arranging a series of fifteen replicas of a colossal marble statue, the Farnese Hercules, in order of size.

Found headless in the Baths of Caracalla in Rome in the sixteenth century, the gigantic image shows a mature, muscle-bound Hercules pausing at the end of the twelve labors that have consumed his life. He has rested his club on the ground (never the most refined of heroes, Hercules went for the crudest of weapons), and behind his back he holds the literal fruits of his final assignment, to bring back the apples of the Hesperides from the ends of the earth. The head he has worn since the Renaissance apparently came from a well in Trastevere, the Roman quarter across the river, but it fits so plausibly that the composite figure quickly took its place among the prime survivals of ancient sculpture.

For two hundred years, the statue stood in the garden of Palazzo Farnese in Rome, but it moved to Naples in the eighteenth century when the son of Elisabetta Farnese became King Charles I of Naples; this is why the full-size replica of the Farnese Hercules in "Portable Classic" is lightweight resin, and comes from one of the stations of the Naples subway (which have become underground art galleries in recent years). Running through the gamut of media from bronze to marble to terra-cotta, the replicas get smaller and smaller, until we reach a six-inch mini-Hercules in porcelain, with rosy cheeks and a rosy belly, more jolly than majestic, lacking every trace of the world-weariness that makes the colossus so affecting. The original, in bronze, was yet another famous work of Lysippos.

Repeating themes guide all these exhibitions and the timely catalog essays that accompany the objects: the presence of multiples in ancient art; the question of copies; the color of bronze; and the remarkable geographical range



Bronze statue of a woman, third century BC; found in 1994 in the sea east of Kalymnos, Greece

Kalymnos Archaeological Museum, Pothia, Greece

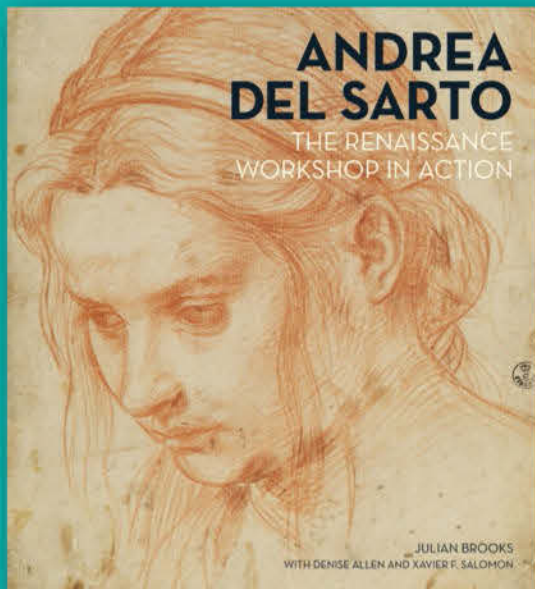
gated tebenna (the Etruscan ancestor to the Roman toga). His short, parted hairstyle makes him look uncannily contemporary, but what most distinguishes this portrait of the priest Aule Meteli (whose name we know from the Etruscan dedication incised into the hem of his tebenna) is his air of dignity, what the Romans were already calling *gravitas*.

The Etruscans smelted bronze in factory sites near Pisa and on the island of Elba; not surprisingly, they worked it masterfully, with less care for proportion than their Greek counterparts and a gift for heightening the expression of emotion. Aule Meteli shows how profoundly their work influenced Renaissance sculptors like Michelangelo, who collected Etruscan bronzes, and unfortunately died (in 1564) just two years

are normally kept in the museum's storerooms, and it is a delight to see them out in the open. The cover of the exhibition catalog shows the ravishingly beautiful head of a young African girl, originally designed to form the body of a tiny bronze pitcher (she still has a hole in the top of her head).

At some point, an artist in the Medici entourage fitted her with a body of mottled black-and-white marble and an ill-fitting set of oversize hands and feet, so that she looks a bit like a stone doll, but the focused intelligence of her face lets her transcend her incongruous body as gracefully as she once transcended the presence of a spout and handle sprouting from her sprightly square-cut hair. The Medici bronzes are flanked by a choice selection of Medici cameos, including an agate portrait of the em-

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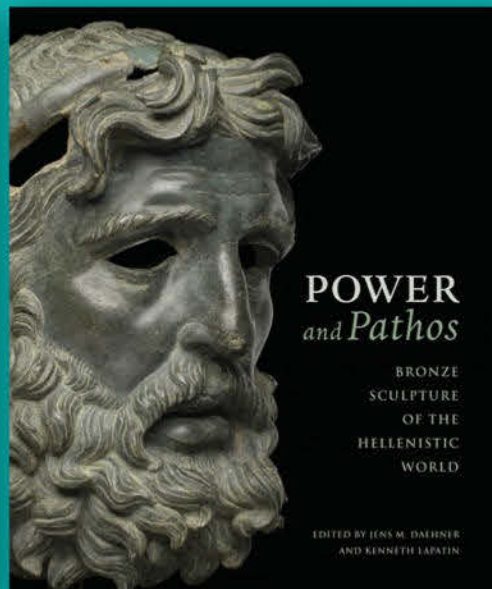


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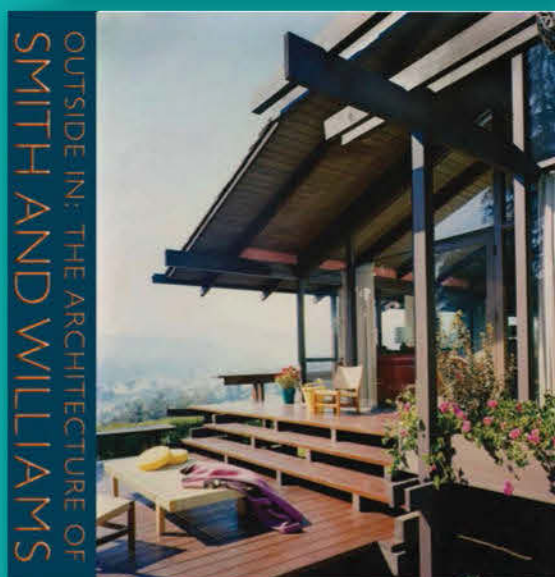


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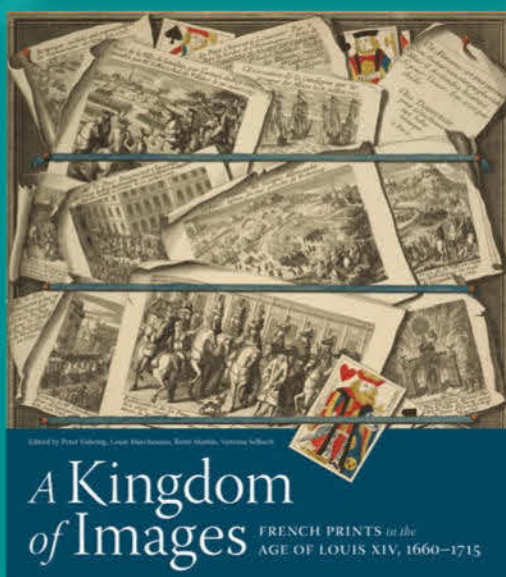


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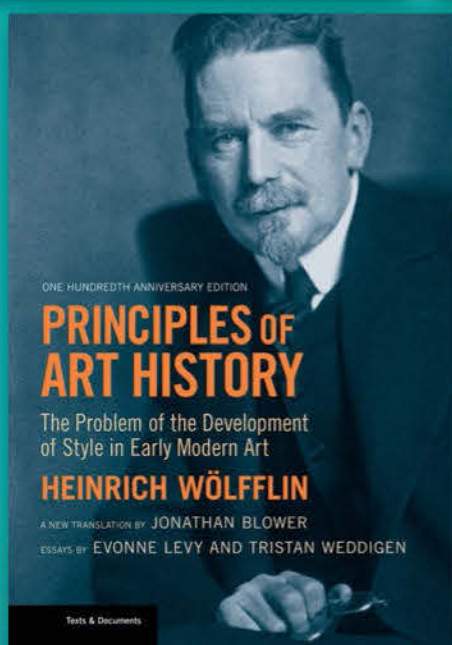


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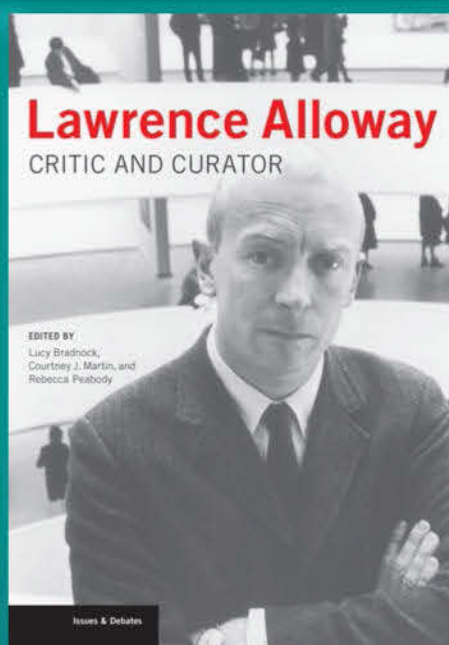
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of the classical world. “Serial Classic” addresses the issue of color by showing what statues might have looked like before weathering set in. The two warriors fished from the sea near Riace in Calabria in 1972 are miraculously well preserved, but the traces of color we still see are nothing like what the originals must have been, with flesh lightened and burnished, black hair, inlaid eyes, lipstick-red lips, and silver teeth. Warrior A is as handsome as a god (he probably is a god), but he always looked mean, and he looks even meaner in his colorized incarnation than he does in his weathered original. Another lost bronze statue, an Apollo with a marble copy now in Kassel, has been reconstructed both as colored bronze and as pure gilt, each version of the sun god more blindingly solar than the other. Meanwhile, outside the window of this exhibition space, Rem Koolhaas has covered an entire pavilion of the Prada complex in gold leaf.

But the strangest and most exotic presence in “Serial Classic” is a fifth-century-BC statue of Penelope mourning her absent husband Odysseus, unaware that he is already on his way home. It is carved in marble from the island of Thasos, a coarse-grained, exceptionally hard stone with crystalline inclusions. Marble this dense must be shaped by polishing as much as by carving, a process that favors clean, simple lines. Penelope’s figure, heavy-breasted with a hint of matronly weight, twinkles and glitters beneath its silken polish, posed with an ineffable grace.

The statue comes, of all places, from Tehran; it was once displayed in the royal palace of Persepolis, where it must have been sent as a gift from the city of Athens sometime after the end of the Persian Wars in 449 BC. A number of later copies of the work are displayed in Milan, but none of them was probably modeled on this particular statue; it must have had an identical, or nearly identical, twin in Athens itself, where it would have been easily accessible to artists. Today, the statue is once again serving the same purpose for which it was carved: to create lasting ties between two powers that have so often come into conflict. “Power and Pathos” has forged similar scholarly relationships; what might have been called the Western classical heritage a generation ago is now rightly termed a heritage that belongs to the world.

Tellingly, however, “Power and Pathos,” “Piccoli Grandi Bronzi,” and “Serial Classic” all begin with a void: in Palazzo Strozzi, with the empty statue base signed Lysippos; in Florence’s National Archeological Museum, with the play of light on miniature statues to cast long shadows of their lost models on the museum walls; in Milan, with blurred images of works that no longer exist in their original form. The classical world was a common point of reference as recently as a generation ago, but it was a classical world understood in ways completely different from the sensibility that animates these exhibitions.

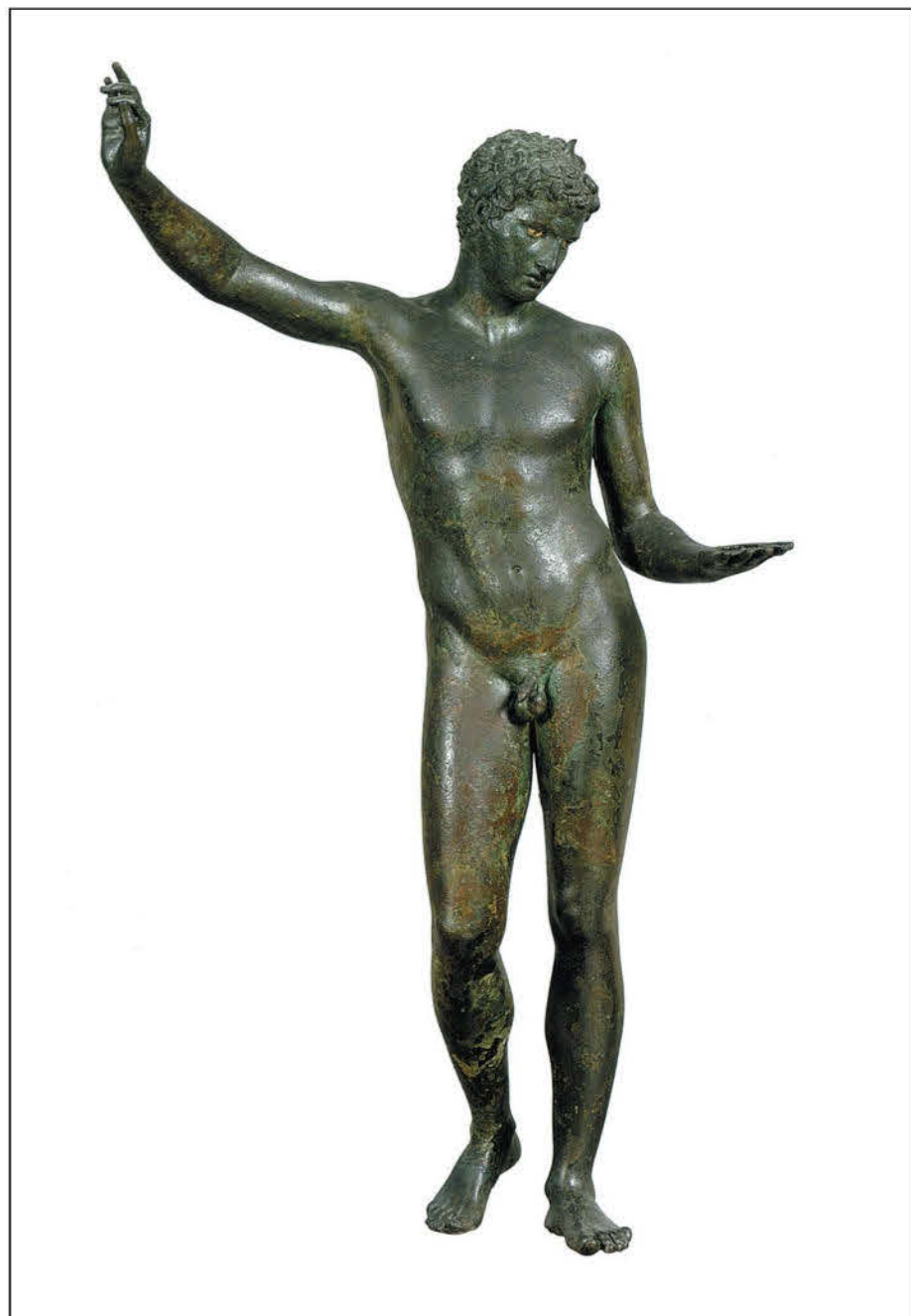
Here East and West, Persian, Greek, and Etruscan meet and mingle without ever losing their individual qualities. A collector in Hadrian’s Rome finds common ground with a painter from Renaissance Venice and the Duke of Liechtenstein (who normally keeps a bronze miniature of Marcus Aurelius on horseback on his desk but lent it out to “Portable Classic”), but also with the

Great King of Persia, who accepted an Athenian statue as the seal of peace between his empire and theirs. The works gathered together for these exhibitions represent real meetings of mind and heart that defy, or better transcend, our present political turmoil, just as love for the beauties of these works of human hands has obliterated boundaries of time, language, culture, and geography.

Yet our connection to that ancient world is indescribably delicate, and always has been. The ax-wielding iconoclasts of ISIS may be our most vivid contemporary image of what destroys these slender, vital connections with those who went before us, but the same

Fiorentino”). Bradburne also invented special itineraries through the exhibitions for families with children, providing them with literal bags of tricks and labels at their eye level.

The cardinal sins of this gifted curator were two: he was born in Canada rather than Tuscany, and he dared to disagree with Matteo Renzi, the one-time Florentine mayor, a brash young politico who has since become the prime minister of Italy. Renzi has often been called Machiavellian, but his is a rough-and-ready Machiavellianism rather than profound study of the master. *The Prince* advises the lord to avert the damage done by flatterers by



‘Marathon Boy,’ from the Bay of Marathon, dated by style to the fourth century BC

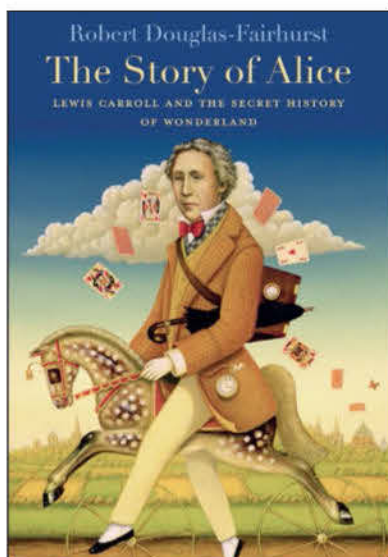
damage can be done by pouring the foundation slab for a supermarket over an archaeological site, as has just happened in Pompeii and happens continually on the outskirts of Rome. Or we can simply drown out ancient voices in a babble of contemporary chatter.

Sadly, contemporary chatter meant that the opening of “Power and Pathos” marked the swan song for James Bradburne, the volcanically inventive director who turned Palazzo Strozzi into a Florentine landmark, opening its courtyard to the public and bringing a marvelous range of artworks to view, both imports (China, Picasso) and clever presentations of the treasures with which Florence is so hyperbolically endowed (“The Springtime of the Renaissance,” “Money and Beauty,” “Bronzino,” “Pontormo and Rosso

choosing the wise men in his state, and giving to them only the liberty of speaking the truth to him.... With these councillors, separately and collectively, he ought to carry himself in such a way that each of them should know that, the more freely he shall speak, the more he shall be preferred; outside of these, he should listen to no one, pursue the thing resolved on, and be steadfast in his resolutions. He who does otherwise is either overthrown by flatterers, or is so often changed by varying opinions that he falls into contempt.

When Machiavelli sat down to read the ancient authors, he dressed in his finest robes as a sign of respect. To move through these four exhibitions, meeting the evergreen art of the ancients, is a privilege of a similar order. □

National Archeological Museum, Athens



The Story of Alice

Lewis Carroll and the Secret History of Wonderland

Robert Douglas-Fairhurst

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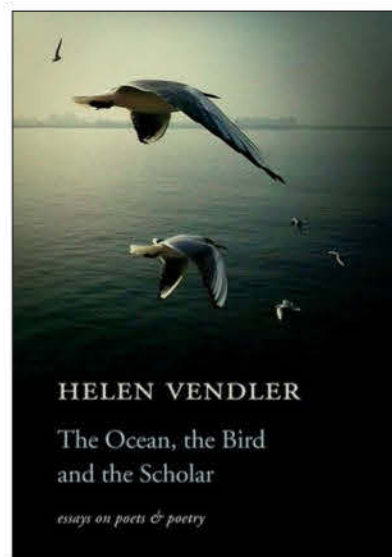
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—A. S. Byatt, *The Spectator*

Belknap Press / \$29.95



The Ocean, the Bird, and the Scholar

Essays on Poets and Poetry

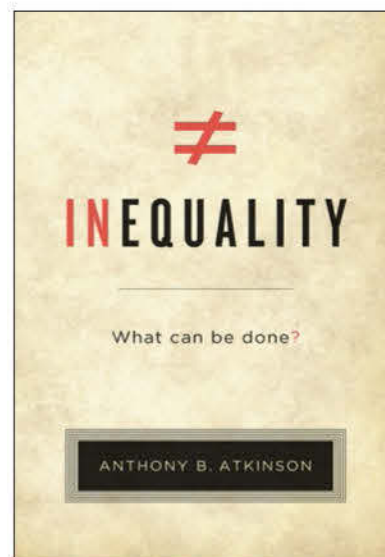
Helen Vendler

A Times Higher Education Book of the Week

"In this triumphant collection, Vendler reminds us why she is one of the most important living scholars of poetry ... This book, with its oceans of depth, reminds us why we need poetry—as well as teachers like Vendler to bring it to transformative life."

—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

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—Paul Krugman, *New York Times*

\$29.95



Bonaparte

1769–1802

Patrice Gueniffey

TRANSLATED BY STEVEN RENDALL

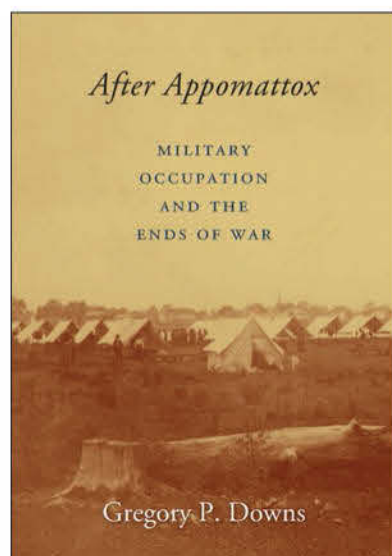
"A masterful portrait, staggeringly complete ... and fluently translated—a delight to read."

—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

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—David A. Bell, *The Nation*

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After Appomattox

Military Occupation and the Ends of War

Gregory P. Downs

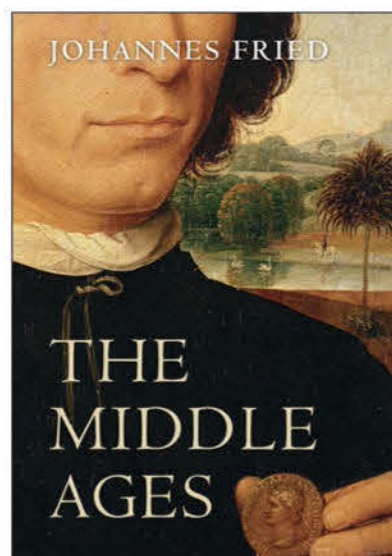
"Downs' book couldn't come at a more opportune time, as American forces once again face the difficult question of how long, and to what ends, an occupying army must stay in conquered territory."

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"Downs wants his work to speak to the present, and indeed it should."

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The Middle Ages

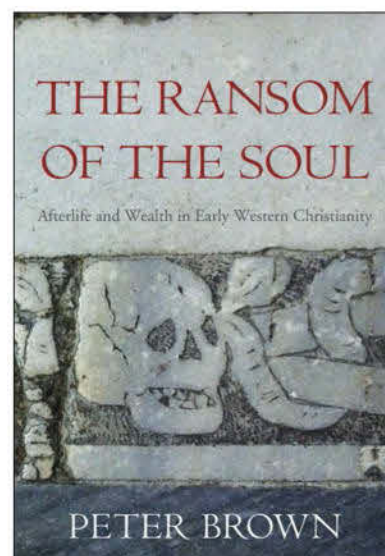
Johannes Fried

TRANSLATED BY PETER LEWIS

"Reads like a counterblast to the hot air of the liberal-humanist interpreters of European history ... [Readers] will be impressed by the main body of the work, which covers a thousand years of mostly Western and Central European history with magnificent confidence."

—Eric Christiansen,
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Belknap Press / \$35.00



The Ransom of the Soul

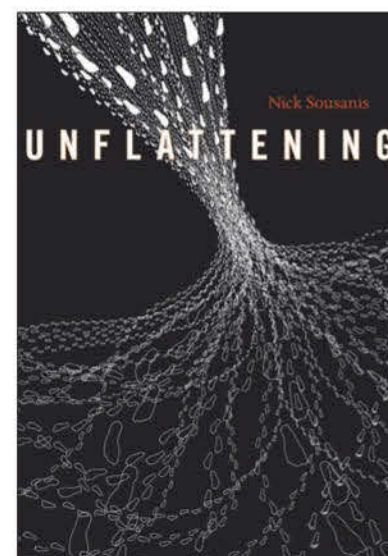
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—Douglas Wolk,
New York Times Book Review

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The New America: Little Privacy, Big Terror

David Cole

Data and Goliath:

The Hidden Battles to Collect Your Data and Control Your World

by Bruce Schneier.
Norton, 383 pp., \$27.95

The Future of Violence:

Robots and Germs, Hackers and Drones: Confronting a New Age of Threat

by Benjamin Wittes and Gabriella Blum.
Basic Books, 324 pp., \$29.99

A War Like No Other:

The Constitution in a Time of Terror

by Owen Fiss, edited and with a foreword by Trevor Sutton.
New Press, 330 pp., \$27.95

Kill Chain:

The Rise of the High-Tech Assassins

by Andrew Cockburn.
Henry Holt, 309 pp., \$28.00

1.

On June 2, 2015, after a Senate cliff-hanger that featured a lengthy filibuster by Rand Paul and a resounding defeat for Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, Congress enacted the USA Freedom Act. The act, whose name echoes the USA Patriot Act, does not exactly mark the restoration of freedom. But it is the first time Congress has limited intelligence powers since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The act ended, at least partially, the National Security Agency's collection in bulk of nearly every American's phone records. It requires the government to limit its demands for phone data and other business records to those related to specific "selectors" (for example, names, phone numbers, or addresses) suspected of terrorism.

The act also improved the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act court process, by requiring the appointment of lawyers with security clearances to argue for privacy in the court's closed-door sessions, until now attended only by the government. And it increased transparency, requiring the government to report on the frequency of its demands for records, and allowing businesses to report how many times they have been approached for records. These are significant victories for privacy.

But consider what the USA Freedom Act didn't do. It didn't address the NSA's practices of collecting enormous amounts of personal data on and communications of foreigners overseas, even when they are communicating with Americans. It said nothing about the NSA hacking into overseas Internet trunk lines to vacuum up indiscriminately data on millions of users, including Americans. It didn't stop the NSA from inserting vulnerabilities into computer networks and encryption systems so that the agency can more easily conduct surveillance.

Nor did the USA Freedom Act address the increasingly common practice of police obtaining "location data"

about citizens from cell phone and Internet service providers that maintain detailed records of everywhere your cell phone goes. It did not change a 1986 law that allows the government to obtain, without probable cause or a warrant, the contents of any e-mail you or your recipient have saved for more than 180 days. It did nothing to check the powers of Google, Facebook, website owners, and Internet service providers to collect, analyze, and sell data about your most private thoughts, desires, as-

trol from half a world away, does not mean that we should do so. If our laws and practices are to keep pace with technology, we cannot afford to ignore the fundamental legal and policy questions the new technologies of surveillance and death pose.

2.

In *Data and Goliath*, Bruce Schneier, a security technologist and fellow at



A mural denouncing US drone strikes, Sanaa, Yemen, November 2014

sociations, and communications. And it was silent on the issue of cybersecurity, notwithstanding the increasingly common data breaches that leave all of us vulnerable to fraud, theft, and worse.

Congress also did not tackle one of Rand Paul's other principal concerns about new technology—the use of unmanned aerial vehicles, or drones, for targeted killing. The last time Senator Paul conducted a marathon filibuster, it was about the possibility that the government might use a drone to kill a US citizen on US soil. Eventually, Attorney General Eric Holder assured the public that the Obama administration does not assert the power to do any such thing. But don't venture overseas, because the government has used a drone to kill an American in Yemen, and insists that it was perfectly lawful to do so. In addition to a handful of US citizens, drone strikes have killed several thousand foreign citizens, in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia, among other places.

In one sense, Congress can hardly be faulted. Advances in technology are so swift that it's difficult for anyone even to keep up with the latest innovations, much less to resolve how to adjust our legal regimes to the digital age. But as Justice Sonia Sotomayor put it, these developments threaten to "alter the relationship between citizen and government in a way that is inimical to democratic society." Even more, they threaten to alter the relationship between foreign citizens and governments in ways that are inimical to fundamental human rights. The fact that we now can spy on seemingly everyone, and can kill individuals by remote con-

Harvard Law School, explores what it means to have entered the age of mass surveillance. Our data are collected in the first instance by private corporations, but are increasingly exploited, as Edward Snowden has shown, by government intelligence agencies. The NSA didn't have to build from scratch a vast database on billions of innocent citizens the world over, Schneier explains, because private corporations had already done so. All the NSA needed was access.

Data is, according to Schneier, "the exhaust of the information age." When we carry our cell phone, use (or have downloaded) apps on those phones, browse websites, send e-mails or texts, drive in our cars, or make purchases with a credit card, we send digital information about our whereabouts, our associations, our interests, and our needs and desires to the corporations that serve us. Because the information is digitized, it is relatively cheap to store, and can be analyzed by computers in great detail.

From even a single data source, one can learn a great deal about a person's private life. A GPS device in your phone or car can pinpoint you to within sixteen to twenty-seven feet at any time of day or night, and can keep a record of your movements. Phone records can show whether you called a rape crisis line, an abortion provider, or Alcoholics Anonymous. The photos we upload to the cloud or social media sites are often embedded with information about the date, time, and place they were taken, and can be identified by increasingly accurate facial recognition systems.

Corporations are taking advantage of these opportunities. Defentek,

a private security firm registered in Panama, sells a device that can "locate and track any phone number in the world...undetected and unknown by the network, carrier, or the target." Amazon Kindle tracks what you read. "Facebook can predict race, personality, sexual orientation, political ideology, relationship status, and drug use on the basis of Like clicks alone."

The US government could not possibly compel us to provide this type of information. Yet, Schneier writes, we allow private companies to have it as a routine matter:

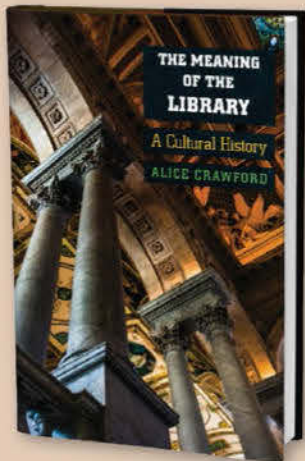
Imagine that the US government passed a law requiring all citizens to carry a tracking device. Such a law would immediately be found unconstitutional. Yet we carry our cell phones everywhere. If the local police department required us to notify it whenever we made a new friend, the nation would rebel. Yet we notify Facebook. If the country's spies demanded copies of all our conversations and correspondence, people would refuse. Yet we provide copies to our e-mail service providers, our cell phone companies, our social networking platforms, and our Internet service providers.

We "agree" in large part because we have no real choice. For the most part, you cannot obtain the services of the digital age without clicking through a "consent" form that authorizes the service provider to collect, analyze, and sell your data.

Schneier argues that if we are to preserve privacy, we must regulate both government and corporate use of this data. The Fourth Amendment regulates only government actors. There are some good reasons for that. Google cannot lock you up or launch a tax investigation against you. Google's computerized monitoring of your e-mails and Web searches in order to direct particular advertising to you poses a less ominous threat than the NSA using the same tools to identify suspicious political beliefs or associations. But, Schneier maintains, we are unlikely to achieve protection from public surveillance unless we also impose some limits on private surveillance. Europe has pursued precisely this option, with a Data Protection Directive that sharply limits what corporations can do with customer data.

Benjamin Wittes and Gabriella Blum, in *The Future of Violence*, remind us that we face danger not only from what security agencies can do with new technology, but also from what bad guys can do. As the recent breach of digital systems at Target and the Office of Personnel Management have shown, no one is safe. A case in point: my tech-savvy son has for some time used a sophisticated password manager, LastPass, which generates unique, random passwords for its subscribers for all websites they use. Sure enough, in June, hackers breached LastPass itself, and gained

Changing the Conversations that Change the World



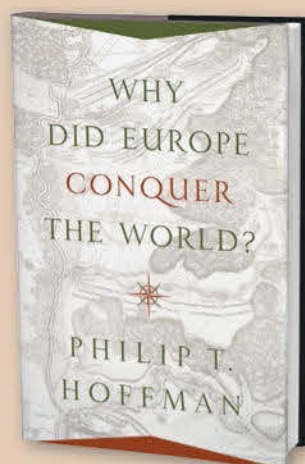
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Edited by Alice Crawford

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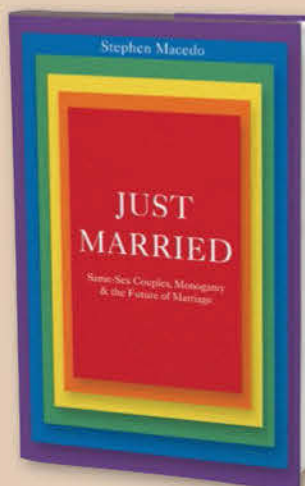
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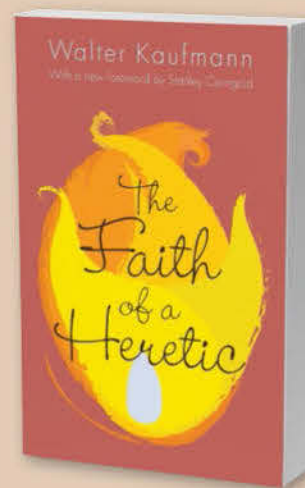
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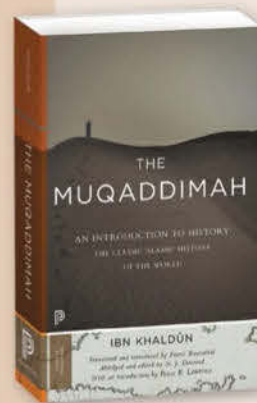
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Translated and introduced by Franz Rosenthal

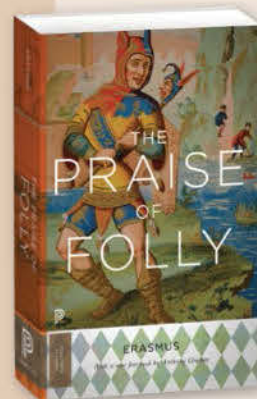
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—Iain Finlayson, *Times*

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An Analysis of the Archetype

Erich Neumann

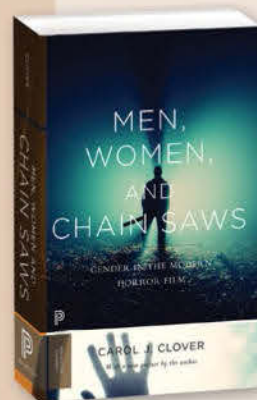
Translated by Ralph Manheim

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“Carol J. Clover’s compelling [book] challenges simplistic assumptions about the relationship between gender and culture.”

—Andrea Walsh, *Boston Globe*

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access to users' e-mail addresses and encrypted master passwords, presumably to facilitate identity theft.

The fact that so much of modern life is mediated through the Internet worries many in the national security field. They are justifiably concerned about attacks on online financial services that could have catastrophic effects on the economy, as well as about the potential manipulation of software that runs public utilities and energy grids. The more that goods and services are controlled by computers, the more vulnerable our lives are to being hacked.

The cybersecurity challenge is worrisome enough. But Wittes and Blum do not stop there. They breathlessly imagine a world in which "technologies of mass empowerment" give everyone the capacity to inflict serious harm on everyone else, from anywhere. They envision a day in which a malevolent person can, from the comfort of his living room, direct a tiny "spider drone" into the home of his enemy, where it will kill the victim in his shower, after first extracting a DNA sample and checking it against a worldwide database to ensure that it's got the right victim. I'm not holding my breath for this futuristic variation on *Psycho*. Nor for the day when there are, as Wittes and Blum also imagine, "billions of people walking around with nuclear weapons in their pockets."

Their basic point, however, is well taken, even if their imaginations occasionally run wild. Advances in technology empower not just private corporations and intelligence agencies, but individuals and groups who might do us harm, and if we are to preserve fundamental values, we need to respond to these threats as well. But in stressing this point, Wittes and Blum too quickly lose sight of the dangers from government surveillance. At one point, they disparage "privacy as sentiment." But privacy is much more than sentiment; it is a necessary element of any humane existence and a foundation of democracy.

At other points, Wittes and Blum seem eager to define away the problem. In a typical passage, they contend that "in our new world, not only do privacy and security not generally conflict, but they are often largely the same thing." If only it were so. But while we undoubtedly need the police to secure our privacy, it does not follow that police work does not often unjustifiably interfere with privacy. To insist that they are "often largely the same thing" is to evade the very questions that new technology compels us to ask.

For example, FBI Director James Comey has recently urged passage of a law that would give the government special access to all encrypted digital communications, in order to thwart terror and crime. But as Schneier argues in *Data and Goliath*, and as he and a group of the world's leading cryptographers and computer scientists show in a paper released on June 7, 2015, one cannot give the government such access without simultaneously risking official abuse and rendering communications vulnerable to criminals.¹ We cannot simply define away the trade-offs between privacy and security.

¹Harold Abelson et al., "Keys Under Doormats: Mandating Insecurity by Requiring Government Access to All Data And Communications," available at hdl.handle.net/1721.1/97690.

To preserve privacy in the Internet age we need not oppose all surveillance, just as the Framers did not bar all searches. The Fourth Amendment prohibits only "unreasonable" searches and seizures. It was designed to forestall general searches—in today's parlance, mass surveillance—and instead to require targeted searches, based on objective grounds for suspicion of criminal activity, not political opinion, associations, or a computer profile. This is not privacy as an absolute, but as a presumptive good, overridden only where there are sound reasons for doing so. But these principles, which have guided us for two centuries, call into question much of the dragnet surveillance that technology now enables, and that the NSA seems to favor.

3.

The drone is in many respects the ultimate new technology that alters the relationship between government and individuals: it empowers the state to kill by remote control from thousands of miles away. The Obama administration has deployed drones much more aggressively than its predecessor. It does so on traditional battlefields such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya; in Pakistan's border regions, parts of which likely qualify as a zone of hostilities; and in Yemen and Somalia, thousands of miles from any battlefield. Obama's rapid escalation in drone attacks may in part reflect advances in technology. In 2001, the US military had eighty-two drones. By 2010, it had nearly eight thousand. It may have been a response to our adversaries having increasingly retreated to areas where they were less susceptible to capture. But it also signals the Obama administration's wholesale adoption of a "kill list" approach to defeating al-Qaeda. If the top leaders could be eliminated, the thinking went, al-Qaeda would be decimated.

It hasn't worked out that way. As Andrew Cockburn relates in *Kill Chain*, one former US official working in Afghanistan said, "They'd come into my province, work their way down the [kill list], but they knew and I knew that all those names on the list would be replaced in a few months." Some in the military took to calling the process "mowing the grass," presumably in recognition that the grass always grows back. As David Kilcullen, former counterinsurgency adviser to General David Petraeus, and Andrew Exum, a former army officer, argued in a *New York Times* Op-Ed in 2009, the drone program is "a tactic—or, more accurately, a piece of technology—substituting for a strategy."²

²Other excellent recent books on the drone program include Richard Whittle's *Predator* (Henry Holt, 2014), which chronicles the discovery and development of the drone itself; Chris Woods's *Sudden Justice* (Oxford University Press, 2015), which, like *Kill Chain*, chronicles America's deployment of drones; and Grégoire Chamayou's *A Theory of the Drone* (New Press, 2014), which undertakes a philosophical investigation of how drones have changed warfare.

One problem is that the much-vaunted accuracy of drones turns out to be overstated. *Kill Chain* opens with a chilling account of drone surveillance of two SUVs and a pickup truck that happened to be driving through the Afghan countryside in 2010 the night a US Special Operations Force dropped in to prepare for an attack. As the drone's video feed is simultaneously monitored in Florida, Nevada, Kandahar, and Bagram Air Force Base, the contemporaneous communications, recorded in a series of text messages, make clear that no one can tell whether the three vehicles are hostile. The images just aren't good enough to distinguish between a woman and a man, a child and an adult, a gun and a shovel. As one CIA officer admitted, "You can only see so much from 20,000 feet."



NATO pilots training on drone simulators at Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico, August 2012

Erring on the side of protecting the US Special Forces, the operators ordered an attack. In fact, the convoy was entirely innocent, and they ended up killing twenty-three civilians, including several women, a three-year-old, and a four-year-old. As Cockburn puts it, "everyone involved tried to clarify the ambiguity [of the hazy video images] by shaping the information to fit a predetermined pattern, in this case that of hostile Taliban."

In another 2010 incident, the military's target was Mohammed Amin, a Taliban leader on the kill list. It had linked him to a cell phone, and the drone was able to pinpoint the phone to a particular car, again in a caravan. When initial bombing missed the car in which the cell phone owner was driving, the drone operator directed a helicopter gunner to finish the job. He swooped in and shot the cell phone user in the head. The only problem was that they had linked the wrong cell phone. Their victim was not a Taliban leader, but an innocent man out with several family members campaigning for his nephew in the upcoming parliamentary elections.

Technology cannot eliminate human error. Still, Obama's drone campaign has had many tactical successes, reportedly killing numerous high-level leaders in al-Qaeda, the Taliban, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), and other assertedly affiliated groups. Yet these tactical successes have come at considerable cost. Ann Patterson, US ambassador to Pakistan, warned in 2009 that drone operations "risk destabilizing the Pakistani state, alienating both the civilian government

and military leadership, and provoking a broader governance crisis in Pakistan without finally achieving the goal." For these reasons, Kilcullen and Exum called for a moratorium on drone strikes in Pakistan as far back as 2009. Dennis Blair, Obama's first director of national intelligence, concurred.

General Stanley McChrystal, who commanded US Special Forces in Afghanistan from 2003 to 2008, and led the entire Afghan operation from 2009 to 2010, may have captured the problem best in a BBC interview:

There's a perception of arrogance, there is a perception of helpless people in an area being shot at like thunderbolts from the sky by an entity that is acting as though they have omniscience and omnipotence. And you can create a tremendous amount of resentment inside populations...because of the way it appears and feels... What seems like a panacea to the messiness of war is not that at all... And wars are ultimately determined in the minds of populations.

Drones raise serious strategic, legal, and policy questions. Yet because of the official secrecy surrounding this program, the Obama administration has made a transparent assessment of those issues impossible. Not until the beginning of Obama's second term did he issue a formal guidance on drones, and even then, much of it was classified. That guidance, summarized in the president's speech at the National Defense University in 2013, authorizes strikes away from the battlefield only to eliminate individuals who pose an imminent threat to US persons, who cannot be captured, when the country in which they are found consents to the attack or is unwilling or unable to counter the threat, and where there is a "near-certainty" that no civilians will be killed or injured.

It is hard to quarrel with this as a legal standard, at least as a matter of theory. But is it being followed in practice? On that issue, the administration's position seems to be, "trust us." It will not even acknowledge most of its attacks, much less explain why particular individuals were targeted, or what actually happened when the bombs dropped. We are left to rely on reports from the field, and at best unofficial government accounts, which often conflict markedly.

Indeed, as ACLU attorneys Jameel Jaffer and Brett Max Kaufman noted in a blog post on *Just Security*, in one recent case the administration could not get its own story straight.³ On June 16, *Bloomberg*, relying on an unnamed government source, reported that the CIA killed Nasir al-Wuyashi, AQAP's "general manager," in a targeted strike "by building a methodical case on his whereabouts over months from information collected through technical means." But later in the week, *The Washington Post* reported, on the basis of another unidentified administration

³Jameel Jaffer and Brett Max Kaufman, "The CIA Can't Keep Its Drone Propaganda Straight," *Just Security*, June 20, 2015.

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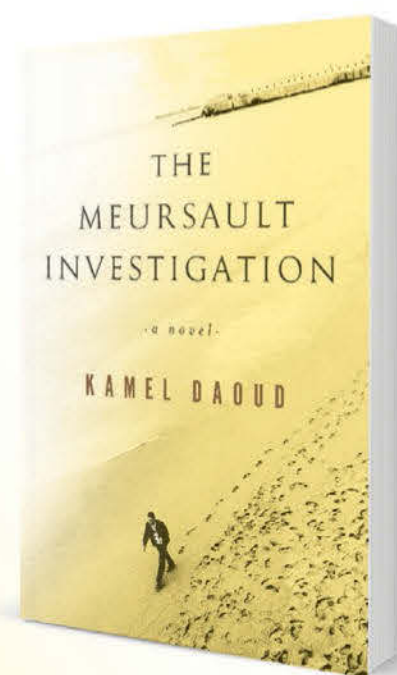
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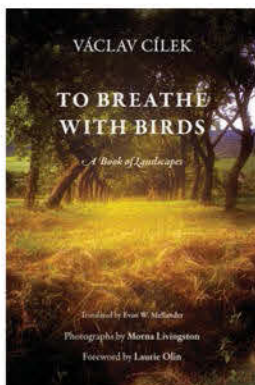
A Book of Landscapes

Václav Cílek. Photographs by Morna Livingston.

Translated by Evan W. Mellander.

Foreword by Laurie Olin

In subtle and lyrical prose, geologist Václav Cílek explores topics from the history of asphalt to the spirits we imagine in trees, from geodiversity to the mathematics of snowflakes. Weaving earth science and environmentalism together with memoir and myth, his chapters visit resonant locations from India to Massachusetts, though most are deeply rooted in the river-laced, war-scarred landscape of Cílek's Czech homeland. These reflections are accompanied by Morna Livingston's evocative photographs, which capture the beauty and strangeness of natural and human-made forms.



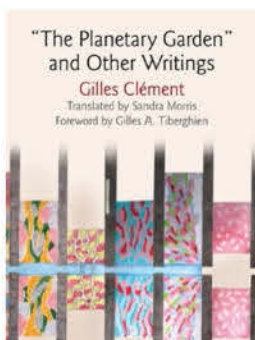
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"THE PLANETARY GARDEN" AND OTHER WRITINGS

Gilles Clément. Translated by Sandra Morris.

Foreword by Gilles A. Tiberghien

Landscape architect Gilles Clément may be best known for his public parks in Paris, including the Parc André Citroën and the garden of the Musée du Quai Branly, but he describes himself as a gardener. In this first of his books to appear in English, Clément writes that to care for and cultivate a plot of land, a capable gardener must observe in order to act and work with, rather than against, the natural ecosystem of the garden. In this sense, he suggests, we should think of the entire planet as a garden, and ourselves as its keepers, responsible for the care of its complexity and diversity of life.



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official, that al-Wuyashi was killed in a "signature strike," in which the targets are not identified from a kill list, but merely fit a pattern of activity that leads the military to infer that they are combatants. Which was it? And how can the administration engage in signature strikes if it purports to authorize strikes only when there is "near-certainty" that no civilians will be killed? Obama isn't saying.

Drones are controversial for many reasons. They inflict intense anxiety on those who live under their shadow, the vast majority of whom are innocent civilians, and therefore they inspire deep resentment. They are the ultimate imperialist weapon, projecting force in other countries without risking vulnerability. Some US drone operators have resigned because of the physical and psychological stress of conducting these attacks. They are a potent symbol of American exceptionalism; as Wittes and Blum ask, would the US tolerate the Assad regime targeting Free Syrian Army members in the US on the ground that the US was unwilling to detain them?

As long as the administration defies any accountability for its actions, they will never be deemed legitimate. And it's worse than that. The Obama administration seems to have adopted a policy on accountability most likely to incur resentment in others: the only strikes it acknowledges are those that kill Americans. In 2013, the administration admitted that four Americans had died in drone strikes. It has never offered a figure for foreign victims, which others have reported number in the thousands. And in April 2015, President Obama publicly apologized, as well he should have, that a January strike in Pakistan had killed two Western hostages, US citizen Warren Weinstein and Italian citizen Giovanni Lo Porto.

But why apologize only when we kill Western innocents? Are not Arab and Muslim innocent victims equally deserving of apologies? This practice of selective accountability is surely the worst double standard of all.

4.

A War Like No Other, a new book by Yale law professor Owen Fiss, points an important way forward. The book, a compendium of eloquent, carefully reasoned, and heartfelt essays written since September 11, sounds two themes particularly responsive to the issues presented by terror and technology. The first is the universality of constitutional and human rights. The Constitution, Fiss writes, affords all "persons," not just citizens, due process with respect to deprivations of life, liberty, or property. It therefore protects all of the US's drone victims, and all US-held detainees, regardless of the passport they have.

The Supreme Court has sometimes suggested, in nonbinding "dicta," that the Constitution does not protect foreigners outside our borders. But the Court has never in fact issued such a broad ruling. On the contrary, in 2008 it extended the constitutional right of habeas corpus to foreign nationals held as enemy combatants at Guantánamo Bay. If Obama were to adhere to the principle of universality that Fiss advocates, he could not apolo-

gize only when a Westerner is killed, or acknowledge a strike only when a US citizen dies. He would have to recognize the equal dignity of all human beings.

Fiss's second theme is one that he has pursued throughout his career as one of the nation's leading legal scholars, namely, that courts have a unique responsibility to articulate and protect constitutional principle. This is as true in times of crisis as in peacetime, Fiss maintains. The courts' obligation is particularly critical with respect to those who are unlikely to find protection from the American political process—such as foreign nationals. It's no accident that the USA Freedom Act reined in only the surveillance authorities directed against US citizens, and left untouched the much more intrusive programs directed against foreigners abroad. Fiss expresses profound disappointment with the Supreme Court's too-modest judgments concerning the war on terror, and with lower courts' refusal even to consider the claims of the victims of torture, rendition, warrantless wiretapping, and targeted killing.

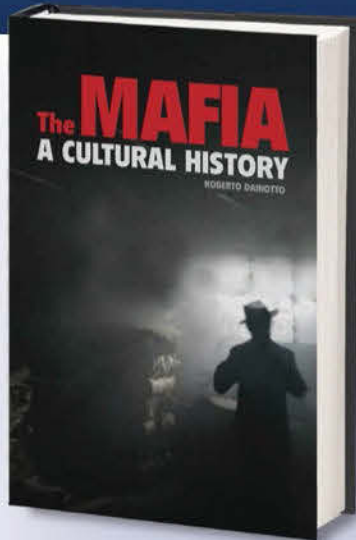
Fiss cites as a model the judgments of Aharon Barak, who as chief justice of the Israeli Supreme Court insisted that the law, and the court, had a central part to play in reviewing all aspects of Israel's response to terror. Barak wrote landmark decisions limiting Israel's detention policies, forbidding torture, requiring relocation of parts of the wall separating Israel from the West Bank, and insisting on strict limits and judicial accountability for targeted killing. He did so, moreover, in a country that faces the threat of terrorism on a much more frequent and intimate basis than does the US.

Fiss is right to demand more from our courts. Why, he asks, can courts review the detention of a US citizen captured on a battlefield fighting for the Taliban, but not the targeted killing of a citizen living in Yemen, far from any battle? Why, if the Israeli Supreme Court can review Israel's every targeted killing after the fact to ensure that it conforms to the limits of law, can't the US courts undertake a similar responsibility?

But while Fiss is right to insist on a more assertive role for the courts, the answer does not lie there entirely. In the end, the courts cannot save us from ourselves. We must insist that the US conform its actions to the principles that have long defined our nation, including the safeguards of privacy, due process, and equality. We should be skeptical of broad-based surveillance without objective suspicion, insist on clear limits on the use of our data by businesses and the government, and demand that all killing off the battlefield be subject to meaningful, individualized accountability. We must do so not only when our own rights are directly affected, as when the NSA collects our phone records, but also when the rights of others are infringed, as when the US kills without justification or conducts mass surveillance of millions of innocent foreigners. In the end, we are the repository of our nation's most fundamental commitments, and it is we who must insist that the seduction of new technologies of surveillance and death not divert us from the values that have stood us well for so long. □

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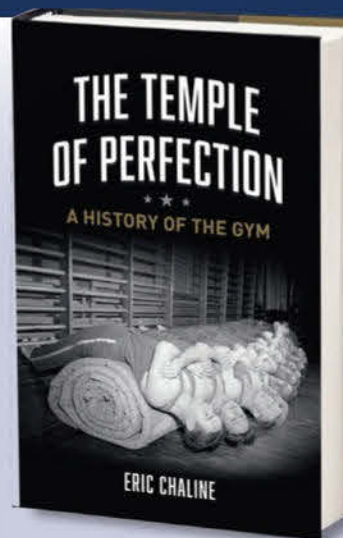
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"This book helps to challenge the many clichés written and said about the Mafia. Written with clarity, intelligence, and expertise, it makes us understand the true essence of the Mafia, a crime organization organically linked to power and wealth and which contributed to the survival of social antagonism."

—Antonio Nicaso, author of *Bloodlines*

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Eric Chaline

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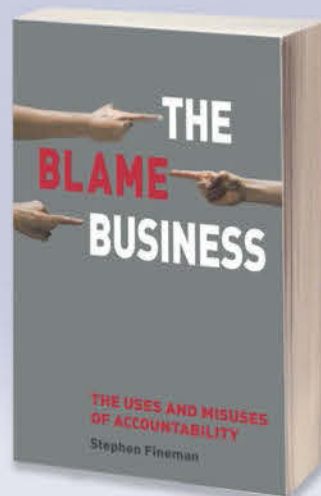
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The Uses and Misuses of Accountability

Stephen Fineman

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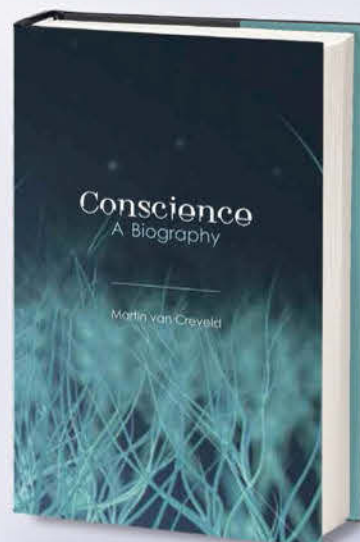
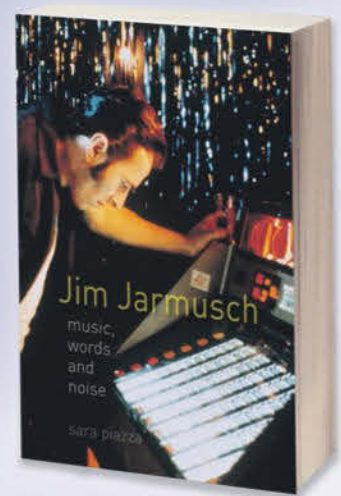
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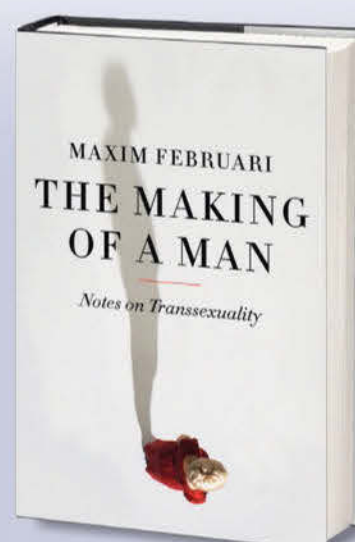
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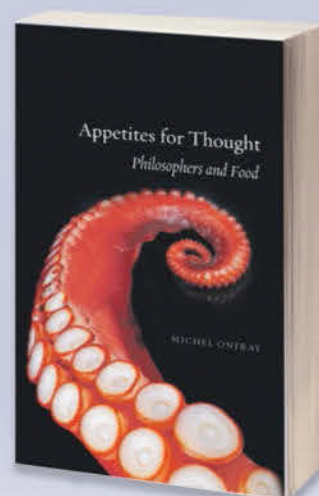
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Translated by Donald Barry and

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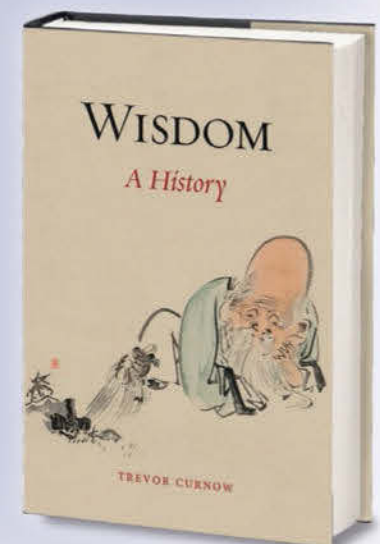
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A History

Trevor Curnow

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The Victory of Queen Margot

Anka Muhlstein

The Rival Queens: Catherine de' Medici, Her Daughter Marguerite of Valois, and the Betrayal That Ignited a Kingdom
by Nancy Goldstone.

Little, Brown, 434 pp., \$30.00

There are figures in French history who tower like monuments. Saint Louis, the Capetian king, a symbol of justice, Joan of Arc, warrior and martyr, and Henry IV, the great peacemaker, are three unmistakable paragons who personified a certain idea of French greatness. Oddly enough, Henry IV's first wife, Marguerite of Valois, remembered as Queen Margot, also enjoys a high place in the popular imagination, although she had no political influence and her life was often threatened in the era's turmoil; unlike her sister-in-law, Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, she never wore the halo of martyrdom.

In France, nonetheless, she remains a popular presence in mass-market history magazines; five motion pictures have been made about her; she has been the subject of numerous biographies, some serious, while many others are far more fanciful and primarily focus on her amorous appetites and her "black legend." In the aftermath of the beheading of her lover, Boniface de la Môle, it was said that she bought his head from the executioner and had it embalmed, and that during her lifetime she carried the hearts of her dead lovers in the pockets of her capacious dresses.

Certainly, Marguerite of Valois (1553–1615) had such a singular and surprising life that it could hardly fail to capture the interest of later generations. To begin with, she was the last member of the Valois dynasty (1328–1589), France's most dazzling royal family. The Valois king who personified the French Renaissance was Francis I, the patron of Leonardo da Vinci, Benvenuto Cellini, and Andrea del Sarto. We owe to him the châteaux of Fontainebleau and Saint-Germain-en-Laye outside Paris and Chambord and Blois in the Loire valley. What's more, Marguerite lived in the second half of the sixteenth century, dramatic years that were as glorious as they were bloody—glorious because of the cultural glow conferred upon them by the first great writers and poets of the modern era, Montaigne, Brantôme, Ronsard, du Bellay; bloody because of the violence and cruelty of the seemingly interminable French Wars of Religion.

Marguerite was five years old when her father, Henry II, died of a lance wound to the eye sustained at a joust. This marked the beginning of the end for the House of Valois. Henry's three surviving sons each succeeded to the throne but none, whether because of physical frailty, weakness of will, or sheer laziness, ever truly ruled as king. It was their mother, Catherine de' Medici, who governed the kingdom for most of that period. Her eldest son, Francis II, married Mary Stuart and died at the age of sixteen, a year and five months after ascending the throne. The second eldest, Charles IX, became king at age ten and died without legitimate issue at age twenty-three, leaving the crown to his younger brother,

Henry III, who had neither the requisite wisdom nor the strength to exert any sort of authority over a nation riven by hatred between Catholics and Protestants. Henry III died childless.

One might have hoped that the marriage of Marguerite—sister to the three kings—to her Huguenot cousin Henry of Navarre in 1572 would bring about a reconciliation between the two religious factions. Instead, the wedding was stained just five days later by the terrifying Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre that left more than three thousand Protestants dead in Paris and put the young queen in an untenable position: the Huguenots, her husband among them, suspected that she had been aware of the plot against them, while the Catholics regarded her with distrust because she refused to abandon her husband after the tragedy.

Pulled first to one side then the other in the years that followed, she took part in various plots but was ultimately spurned by both sides. She then took refuge in a fortress in Auvergne, in central France, where she lived for almost twenty years in a state of internal exile that looked very much like captivity. The assassination of her sole surviving brother, Henry III, in 1589, set off the final crisis.

In the absence of a direct heir, the crown fell to Henry of Navarre. But the civil war raged unabated. The new king was forced to fight on for another four years before he was able to enter his own capital city. That was when he decided to abjure Protestantism: his famous declaration, "*Paris vaut bien une messe*" (Paris is well worth a mass), put a de facto end to the fighting. Henry IV had conquered the throne and was crowned king in 1594. Now he needed to put his conjugal affairs in order.

His marriage with Marguerite had produced no offspring. That outcome was hardly surprising given the lack of physical attraction between husband and wife and the infrequency with which they shared the same bed. Now, however, they were in agreement on one crucial point: their marriage had to be dissolved. The annulment would allow the king, already the father of a multitude of illegitimate children, to establish a lineage. The queen was therefore willing to be "unmarried" in order to allow another woman to take her place, provide the king with heirs, assure the future of the new dynasty, and facilitate a return of peace.

The woman who replaced her was Marie de' Medici. Thereupon, in what was perhaps the most astonishing phase of her career, instead of fading

away Queen Marguerite experienced twenty years of veritable splendor. Once the marriage was dissolved, the ex-spouses became the best of friends. The new queen, Marie, was inexperienced. It was said she was awkward and ignorant. So Henry IV asked Marguerite to teach her the customs of the court. Since he valued her skill in projecting the image of royal dignity and wished to show her the greatest marks of respect, he also entrusted her with

one still spoke of her at all, it was only to keep alive a scandalous and meretricious legend that focused on her lust, disorderly life, lavish spending, and immorality. As the French Revolution loomed, her memory suffered in particular from a groundswell of hostility toward queens, flamboyant princesses, and courtesans that culminated in the explosion of hatred for Marie Antoinette. The First French Empire was to prove no kinder to exceptional women, for Napoleon ratified the revolutionary principle of the juridical inferiority of women. And yet, thirty years after the fall of the Empire, Marguerite made her comeback.

The most plausible explanation for that unexpected revival is a novel by Alexandre Dumas published in 1844, in which, dexterously blending fact and fiction, he transformed a frozen image into an impetuous, unforgettable, popular character. Out of Queen Marguerite, he created Queen Margot. But she wasn't really his own invention: Marguerite had become fashionable again, first of all because she was being read. Four new editions of her memoirs appeared between 1823 and 1842, as well as a substantial selection of her letters. Stendhal made her the idol and inspiration of Mathilde de la Mole in *The Red and the Black*. (In the novel, the de la Mole family are descendants of Marguerite's lover.) It's the memory

of the queen of Navarre that gives Mathilde the "superhuman courage" to place the head of Julien Sorel, her guillotined lover, "upon a little marble table...and [to kiss] his brow." And finally, Marguerite was the inspiration for two operas, Ferdinand Hérold's *Le Pré aux clercs* (*The Clerks' Meadow*), with a libretto by Prosper Mérimée, and Giacomo Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*. (The Valois princesses seemed to inspire composers. Marguerite's elder sister, Elisabeth, who was married to Philip II of Spain, is the heroine of Verdi's *Don Carlos*.)

As for the nineteenth century's more general revival of interest in the Renaissance, that can be attributed to a yearning for escape from a period in which dull materialism triumphed and exasperated true artists. How could anyone suffocating under the rule of Louis Philippe, the bourgeois king, help dreaming of a century marked by a taste for pomp and festivities, set against a backdrop of warfare, duels, intrigues, and treason? Balzac chose to rehabilitate Catherine de' Medici in a novel that was largely ignored. Dumas had better luck, choosing Marguerite



Marguerite of Valois as a child; portrait by François Clouet, circa 1561

Musée Condé, Chantilly/Bridgeman Images



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Gustave Caillebotte. *Paris Street; Rainy Day* (detail), 1877. Charles H. and Mary F. S. Worcester Collection.

of Valois for the first in his series of historical novels. As befitted a skilled feuilleton writer who never mistook himself for a historian, Dumas tried above all to create characters who draw the reader in, frequently at the expense of subtlety and accuracy.

In his narrative, Catherine de' Medici turns into an implacable and malevolent character while Charles IX is a bloodthirsty lunatic. Dumas makes a shining hero of Henry of Navarre. His depiction of Margot is more nuanced. He portrays her as sensual, adventurous, and yet practical. He also endows her with qualities of mind and presents her as better educated than her husband and brothers. Dumas doubtless took inspiration from an anecdote related by a number of contemporary observers: the young princess was said to have been the only member of her family capable of answering the Polish ambassadors in Latin upon their arrival at court. It is amusing to note that a revolutionary pamphleteer, Sylvain Maréchal, virulently opposed to the emancipation of women, proposed a law in 1802 that would have forbidden teaching girls to read, arguing that "if the first wife of Henry IV, Marguerite of Valois, hadn't known how to write she might have been less amorous."

Above all, though, Dumas's Margot is no distant princess: she is a realist, determined to back her husband because, as she says, "it is the duty of a wife to share in her husband's fortunes," without letting that keep her from her escapades. Merry, mischievous, quick-witted, she has a common touch that appeals to ordinary people. The novel ends when Margot is only twenty-one, with a long and agitated life still before her. The popularity of the novelized history of Marguerite of Valois has never waned since it first appeared. In France, there has been an unbroken chain of editions up to the present day, three of them in the past ten years.

The story told by Dumas is good-natured, improving Queen Margot's reputation. Over the years, the queen has continued to tempt filmmakers, biographers, and journalists, but they have interpreted her story in an increasingly dubious fashion. Margot became a nymphomaniac in the 1950s, in particular in a very widely read book by Guy Breton. In Patrice Chéreau's 1994 film *La Reine Margot*, she chased relentlessly after men until, in the end, she was viciously attacked by her brothers. It would be difficult to make anything more insidious, anything less historically accurate. However, recently following the lead of the historian Éliane Viennot, books have been published that cleave closer to historical truth and depict a more complex and interesting character.

The latest work is actually a double biography: Nancy Goldstone has chosen to treat the life of Marguerite alongside that of Catherine de' Medici. The decision was shrewd because, until Catherine's death, the mother never gave an inch in wielding power over her daughter. Still, the book's title, *The Rival Queens*, is surprising inasmuch as it takes a certain degree of equality to create a rivalry. Whereas Catherine, in her role as regent first and later through sheer force of character and the extraordinary authority that she exercised over all her children, had always terrorized her daughter. After the

tragedy of Saint Bartholomew's Day, it became clear to Marguerite that her mother wouldn't hesitate to sacrifice her if it served her purposes, and she never entirely overcame the fear that Catherine inspired in her.

One of the challenges facing any historian of this period is the sheer profusion of themes that need to be handled. Just a few examples: the extreme complexity of the dynastic situation, aggravated by the scheming and intrigues of a violently divided royal family; the repercussions of the civil war; the international tensions that sprang from the rivalry between Spain, France, and England; the uncertainty surrounding the possible marriage of Queen Elizabeth—for twelve years Catherine

arch and the jeweled crowns and saw a very short, corpulent older Italian woman dressed all in black who ate and talked and walked incessantly accompanied by an unhealthy-looking, puerile boy who obediently parroted her commands. They were not a pair who inspired confidence.

She also makes good use of primary sources—the reports of ambassadors, especially the extraordinarily well informed Venetian ambassadors, who wrote in a strikingly direct manner, as well as the memoirs and correspondence of the era—and quotes extensively to illuminate her text. Here is Marguerite in her mother's apartment, just hours before the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre:



'Gabrielle d'Estrées and One of Her Sisters'; anonymous painting showing, at right, Henry of Navarre's mistress Gabrielle d'Estrées, circa 1594

nursed hopes of seeing her married to one of her sons, and she didn't give up that dream until the death of the youngest. What makes Goldstone's biography so enjoyable is that she manages, thanks to the clarity of her presentation, to lead readers through this labyrinth with a sure and steady hand.

Goldstone displayed the same qualities in her previous books. She is a popular historian whose writing is based on very serious research, with a gift for telling the most complicated tale in vivid, accessible prose. In *The Rival Queens* as in *Four Queens*, her book set in the thirteenth century, a time of chivalry and crusades, or in *The Lady Queen*, a portrait of the fourteenth-century queen of Naples, Jerusalem, and Sicily, she delights in unraveling the most drastic family entanglements in periods of violent insecurity.*

Another characteristic of her work is the importance she gives to the physical appearance of her subjects. When she wants to make the point that Catherine lacked charisma, she does not go into wordy analysis. Instead she simply describes her entry into a town:

When Catherine and Charles IX entered in procession, many of the townspeople looked right past the cloth of gold and the triumphal

The Queen my mother... bade me go to bed. As I was taking leave, my sister seized me by the hand and stopped me, at the same time shedding a flood of tears: "For the love of God," cried she, "do not stir out of this chamber!"... The Queen... called my sister to her and chid her very severely. My sister replied it was sending me away to be sacrificed.

The queen mother, implacable, refused to retreat and Marguerite was forced to retire. "As soon as I reached my own closet, I threw myself upon my knees and prayed to God to... save me; but from whom or what, I was ignorant." (She was not harmed.)

Here is Marguerite's brother King Henry III, his arms ringed in coral bracelets, "ordinarily dressed as a woman... exposing his throat," surrounded by his companions, the *mignons*, "frilled and curled with their crests lifted, the crinkles in their hair... and covered with violet powders and odiferous scents, which smell up the streets, squares and houses they frequent."

Goldstone sketches a very convincing portrait of Queen Marguerite. She sees in her an unusual and oddly liberated woman in spite of the pressures to which she was subjected. That she was sensual there can be no doubt, and she was frequently passionately amorous, but at the same time she was guided first and foremost by her religious fervor and by her political loyalty to her

husband, whose life she saved in the aftermath of the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre. The most telling example of her rectitude is the fact that Henry of Navarre himself asked her to draw up the brief for his defense when he was charged with taking part in a conspiracy. She acquitted herself so intelligently in this task that he was freed on the spot.

Finally, Goldstone underscores Marguerite's love of reading, which allowed her to put up with years of solitary life with considerable equanimity:

My captivity and its consequent solitude afforded me the double advantage of exciting a passion for study, and an inclination for devotion, advantages I had never experienced during the vanities and splendor of my prosperity.

This spirit of independence, this inner freedom, this genuine intellectual capacity all explain the degree to which Goldstone is tempted to see in her a precursor to the feminist movement.

I think we should resist the temptation to see Marguerite as a feminist *avant la lettre*. The concept can hardly be applied to a sixteenth-century princess. Under the ancien régime, rank and wealth counted for more than gender. But from the French Revolution until the years that followed World War II, sex was decisive, because for all the talk of the equality of men, women possessed no civil rights at all. An illiterate French peasant could vote; Marie Curie could not.

Nothing comparable could be said about the sixteenth century, when royal princesses had the right, both by birth and by talent, to play important political parts. Two women, Margaret of Austria, regent of the Netherlands, and Louise of Savoy, mother of Francis I, negotiated the *Paix des Dames* (Peace of the Ladies), as the Treaty of Cambrai was also known, putting an end to the war between Francis I and Charles V in 1529. In the following generation, two half-sisters, Mary Tudor and Elizabeth, reigned successively over England while Catherine de' Medici held sovereign sway over France. But such power was not available to Marguerite of Valois. She proved incapable of bringing about a reconciliation between Huguenots and Catholics because she was caught up in incessant conflicts of loyalty, while the fact that her marriage remained barren led her to agree to leave her place on the throne at the side of Henry IV.

Ironically, it was the dissolution of that marriage that brought her the happiest years of her life. "Against all the odds," wrote Goldstone, "she had survived the murderous brutality of her family and her times." She kept her title of queen; by now she was independently wealthy. Henry IV had returned her dowry and, more important still, she had succeeded in overturning her mother's will, which disinherited her in favor of an illegitimate son of Charles IX. With no one to answer to, she continued to take lovers in spite of the fact that she had turned from a lovely young maiden into an aging woman so fat that it was said that "there were many doors through which she could not pass."

Most important of all, she had the wit to surround herself with a refined court, an entourage of poets and musicians, in striking contrast to the mediocre courtiers of Marie de' Medici.

Finally, Marguerite, faithful to her Valois blood, built herself a superb home, directly across from the Louvre, on the Left Bank, where the École des Beaux-Arts now stands. Her gardens

extended to the rue du Bac in a park that was open to the public. The palace is long gone, but the queen's memory is inscribed in the Parisian cityscape. The long parallels of the rue de Lille, rue de

Verneuil, and rue de l'Université still mark, four centuries later, the stately *allées* of the park of Queen Margot. □

—Translated from the French
by Antony Shugaar

The Mystery of ISIS

Anonymous

ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror

by Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan. Regan Arts, 270 pp., \$14.00 (paper)

ISIS: The State of Terror

by Jessica Stern and J. M. Berger. Ecco, 385 pp., \$27.99

The author has wide experience in the Middle East and was formerly an official of a NATO country. We respect the writer's reasons for anonymity.

—The Editors

Ahmad Fadhil was eighteen when his father died in 1984. Photographs suggest that he was relatively short, chubby, and wore large glasses. He wasn't a particularly poor student—he received a B grade in junior high—but he decided to leave school. There was work in the garment and leather factories in his home city of Zarqa, Jordan, but he chose instead to work in a video store, and earned enough money to pay for some tattoos. He also drank alcohol, took drugs, and got into trouble with the police. So his mother sent him to an Islamic self-help class. This sobered him up and put him on a different path. By the time Ahmad Fadhil died in 2006 he had laid the foundations of an independent Islamic state of eight million people that controlled a territory larger than Jordan itself.

The rise of Ahmad Fadhil—or as he was later known in the jihad, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi—and ISIS, the movement of which he was the founder, remains almost inexplicable. The year 2003, in which he began his operations in Iraq, seemed to many part of a mundane and unheroic age of Internet start-ups and a slowly expanding system of global trade. Despite the US-led invasion of Iraq that year, the borders of Syria and Iraq were stable. Secular Arab nationalism appeared to have triumphed over the older forces of tribe and religion. Different religious communities—Yezidis, Shabaks, Christians, Kaka'is, Shias, and Sunnis—continued to live alongside one another, as they had for a millennium or more. Iraqis and Syrians had better incomes, education, health systems, and infrastructure, and an apparently more positive future, than most citizens of the developing world. Who then could have imagined that a movement founded by a man from a video store in provincial Jordan would tear off a third of the territory of Syria and Iraq, shatter all these historical institutions, and—defeating the combined militaries of a dozen of the wealthiest countries on earth—create a mini empire?

The story is relatively easy to narrate, but much more difficult to understand. It begins in 1989, when Zarqawi, inspired by his Islamic self-help class, traveled from Jordan to “do jihad” in Afghanistan. Over the next decade he

fought in the Afghan civil war, organized terrorist attacks in Jordan, spent years in a Jordanian jail, and returned—with al-Qaeda help—to set up a training camp in Herat in western Afghanistan. He was driven out of Afghanistan by the US-led invasion of 2001, but helped back onto his feet by the Iranian government. Then, in 2003—with the assistance of Saddam loyalists—he set up an insurgency network in Iraq. By targeting Shias and their most holy sites, he was able to turn an insurgency against US troops into a Shia-Sunni civil war.

Zarqawi was killed by a US air strike in 2006. But his movement improbably survived the full force of the 170,000-strong, \$100 billion a year US troop surge. In 2011, after the US withdrawal, the new leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, expanded into Syria and reestablished a presence in northwest Iraq. In June 2014 the movement took Mosul—Iraq's second-largest city—and in May 2015 the Iraqi city of Ramadi and the Syrian city of Palmyra, and its affiliates took the airport in Sirte, Libya. Today, thirty countries, including Nigeria, Libya, and the Philippines, have groups that claim to be part of the movement.

Although the movement has changed its name seven times and has had four leaders, it continues to treat Zarqawi as its founder, and to propagate most of his original beliefs and techniques of terror. *The New York Times* refers to it as “the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL.” Zarqawi also called it “Army of the Levant,” “Monotheism and Jihad,” “al-Qaeda in Iraq,” and “Mujihadeen Shura Council.” (A movement known for its marketing has rarely cared about consistent branding.) I will simplify the many changes of name and leadership by referring to it throughout as “ISIS,” although it has of course evolved during its fifteen years of existence.

The problem, however, lies not in chronicling the successes of the move-

ment, but in explaining how something so improbable became possible. The explanations so often given for its rise—the anger of Sunni communities, the logistical support provided by other states and groups, the movement's social media campaigns, its leadership, its tactics, its governance, its revenue streams, and its ability to attract tens of thousands of foreign fighters—fall far short of a convincing theory of the movement's success.

Emma Sky's book *The Unraveling: High Hopes and Missed Opportunities in Iraq*,¹ for example, a deft, nuanced, and often funny account of her years as a civilian official in Iraq between 2003 and 2010, illustrates the mounting Sunni anger in Iraq. She shows how US policies such as de-Baathification in 2003 began the alienation of Sunnis, and how this was exacerbated by the atrocities committed by Shia militias in 2006 (fifty bodies a day were left on the streets of Baghdad, killed by power drills inserted in their skulls). She explains the often imaginative steps that were taken to regain the trust of the Sunni communities during the surge of 2007, and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's alienation of those communities again after the US withdrawal in 2011 through his imprisonment of Sunni leaders, his discrimination and brutality, and the disbanding of Sunni militias.

But many other insurgent groups, quite different from ISIS, often seemed to have been in a much stronger position to have become the dominant vehicles of “Sunni anger.” Sunnis in Iraq initially had minimal sympathy with Zarqawi's death cult and with his movement's imposition of early medieval social codes. Most were horrified when Zarqawi blew up the UN headquarters in Baghdad; when he released a film in which he personally sawed off the head of an American civilian; when he blew up the great Shia shrine at Samarra and

¹PublicAffairs, 2015.



A still from a video released by ISIS on April 19, which appears to show the execution of Ethiopian Christians by members of Wilayat Barqa, an affiliate of ISIS in eastern Libya

killed hundreds of Iraqi children. After he mounted three simultaneous bomb attacks against Jordanian hotels—killing sixty civilians at a wedding party—the senior leaders of his Jordanian tribe and his own brother signed a public letter disowning him. *The Guardian* was only echoing the conventional wisdom when it concluded in Zarqawi's obituary: “Ultimately, his brutality tarnished any aura, offered little but nihilism and repelled Muslims worldwide.”

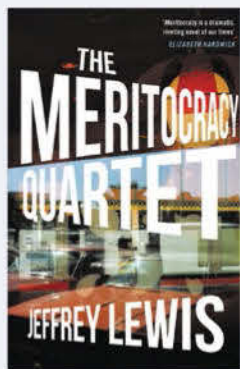
Other insurgent groups also often seemed more effective. In 2003, for example, secular Baathists were more numerous, better equipped, better organized, and more experienced military commanders; in 2009, the militia of the “Sunni Awakening” had much better resources and its armed movement was more deeply rooted locally. In 2011, the Free Syrian Army, including former officers of the Assad regime, was a much more plausible leader of resistance in Syria; and so in 2013 was the more extremist militia Jabhat al-Nusra. Hassan Hassan and Michael Weiss show in *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, for example, that al-Nusra formed far closer links to tribal groups in East Syria—even marrying its fighters to tribal women.

Such groups have sometimes blamed their collapse and lack of success, and ISIS's rise, on lack of resources. The Free Syrian Army, for example has long insisted that it would have been able to supplant ISIS if its leaders had received more money and weapons from foreign states. And the Sunni Awakening leaders in Iraq argue that they lost control of their communities only because the Baghdad government ceased to pay their salaries. But there is no evidence that ISIS initially received more cash or guns than these groups; rather the reverse.

Hassan Hassan and Michael Weiss's account suggests that much of the early support for the ISIS movement was limited because it was inspired by ideologues who themselves despised Zarqawi and his followers. The al-Qaeda cash that launched Zarqawi in 1999, for example, was, in their words, “a pittance compared to what al-Qaeda was financially capable of disbursing.” The fact that it didn't give him more reflected bin Laden's horror at Zarqawi's killing of Shias (bin Laden's mother was Shia) and his distaste for Zarqawi's tattoos.

Although the Iranians gave Zarqawi medical aid and safe haven when he was a fugitive in 2002, he soon lost their sympathy by sending his own father-in-law in a suicide vest to kill Ayatollah Mohammad Baqir al-Hakim, Iran's senior political representative in Iraq, and by blowing up one of the most sacred Shia

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—The Independent

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—Edward Zwick

for *Adam the King*: "Lewis's gripping . . . novel traces one man's heroic but flawed attempt to make good of past mistakes. The narrative is tense, and Lewis's well-meaning, blinkered hero is a marvelous creation."

—Publishers Weekly (starred review)

for *Adam the King*: "Funny, heartbreaking, and believable, this is a gem of a novel."

—Library Journal (starred review)

Haus Publishing

shrines. And although ISIS has relied for more than a decade on the technical skills of the Baathists and the Sufi Iraqi general Izzat al-Douri, who controlled an underground Baathist militia after the fall of Saddam, this relationship has been strained. (The movement makes no secret of its contempt for Sufism, its destruction of Sufi shrines, or its abhorrence of everything that Baathist secular Arab nationalists espouse.)

Nor has the leadership of ISIS been particularly attractive, high-minded, or competent—although some allowance should be made for the understandable revulsion of the biographers. Mary-Anne Weaver, in a 2006 *Atlantic* article, describes Zarqawi as "barely literate," "a bully and a thug, a bootlegger and a heavy drinker, and even, allegedly, a pimp." Weiss and Hassan call him an "intellectual lightweight." Jessica Stern and J. M. Berger in *ISIS: The State of Terror* say this "thug-turned-terrorist" and "mediocre student . . . arrived in Afghanistan as a zero." Weaver describes his "botched operation[s]" in Jordan and his use of a "hapless would-be bomber." Stern and Berger explain that bin Laden and his followers did not like him because they "were mostly members of an intellectual educated elite, while Zarqawi was a barely educated ruffian with an attitude."

If writers have much less to say about the current leader, al-Baghdadi, this is because his biography, as Weiss and Hassan concede, "still hovers not far above the level of rumor or speculation, some of it driven, in fact, by competing jihadist propagandists."

Nor is ISIS's distinctive approach to insurgency—from holding territory to fighting regular armies—an obvious advantage. Lawrence of Arabia advised that insurgents must be like a mist—everywhere and nowhere—never trying to hold ground or wasting lives in battles with regular armies. Chairman Mao insisted that guerrillas should be fish who swam in the sea of the local population. Such views are the logical corollaries of "asymmetric warfare" in which a smaller, apparently weaker group—like ISIS—confronts a powerful adversary such as the US and Iraqi militaries. This is confirmed by US Army studies of more than forty historical insurgencies, which suggest again and again that holding ground, fighting pitched battles, and alienating the cultural and religious sensibilities of the local population are fatal.

But such tactics are exactly part of ISIS's explicit strategy. Zarqawi lost thousands of fighters trying to hold Fallujah in 2004. He wasted the lives of his suicide bombers in constant small attacks and—by imposing the most draconian punishments and obscurantist social codes—outraged the Sunni communities that he claimed to represent. ISIS fighters are now clearly attracted by the movement's ability to control territory in such places as Mosul—as an interview in Yalda Hakim's recent BBC documentary *Mosul: Living with Islamic State* confirms. But it is not clear that this tactic—although alluring, and at the moment associated with success—has become any less risky.

The movement's behavior, however, has not become less reckless or tactically bizarre since Zarqawi's death. One US estimate by Larry Schweikart suggested that 40,000 insurgents had been

killed, about 200,000 wounded, and 20,000 captured before the US even launched the surge in 2006. By June 2010, General Ray Odierno claimed that 80 percent of the movement's top forty-two leaders had been killed or captured, with only eight remaining at large. But after the US left in 2011, instead of rebuilding its networks in Iraq, the battered remnants chose to launch an invasion of Syria, and took on not just the regime, but also the well-established Free Syrian Army. It attacked the movement's Syrian branch—Jabhat-al-Nusra—when it broke away. It enraged al-Qaeda in 2014 by killing al-Qaeda's senior emissary in the region. It deliberately provoked tens of thousands of Shia militiamen to join the fight on the side of the Syrian regime, and then challenged the Iranian Quds force by advancing on Baghdad.



A still from the video released by ISIS on April 19, which appears to show the execution of Ethiopian Christians by members of Wilayat Fazzan, another affiliate of ISIS, in southern Libya

Next, already struggling against these new enemies, the movement opened another front in August 2014 by attacking Kurdistan, driving the Kurdish forces—who had hitherto stayed out of the battle—to retaliate. It beheaded the American journalist James Foley and the British aid worker David Haines, thereby bringing in the US and UK. It enraged Japan by demanding hundreds of millions of dollars for a hostage who was already dead. It finished 2014 by mounting a suicidal attack on Kobane in Syria, in the face of over six hundred US air strikes, losing many thousands of ISIS fighters and gaining no ground. When, as recently as April, the movement lost Tikrit and seemed to be declining, the explanation appeared obvious. Analysts were on the verge of concluding that ISIS had lost because it was reckless, abhorrent, over-extended, fighting on too many fronts, with no real local support, unable to translate terrorism into a popular program, inevitably outmatched by regular armies.

Some analysts have, therefore, focused their explanations not on the movement's often apparently self-defeating military strategy, but on its governance and revenue, its support from the population, and its reliance on tens of thousands of foreign fighters. Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, a fellow of the Middle East Forum, has explained in recent blog posts how in some occupied cities such as Raqqa in Syria, the movement has created complicated civil service structures, taking control even of municipal waste departments. He describes the revenue it derives from local income and property taxes, and by leasing out former Iraqi and Syrian state offices to businesses. He

shows how this has given ISIS a broad and reliable income base, which is only supplemented by the oil smuggling and the antiquity looting so well described by Nicolas Pelham in these pages.²

ISIS's power is now reinforced by the staggering arsenal that the movement has taken from the fleeing Iraqi and Syrian army—including tanks, Humvees, and major artillery pieces. Reports from *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, Reuters, and Vice News over the last twelve months have shown that many Sunnis in Iraq and Syria now feel that ISIS is the only plausible guarantor of order and security in the civil war, and their only defense against brutal retribution from the Damascus and Baghdad governments.

But here too the evidence is confusing and contradictory. Yalda Hakim's BBC documentary on Mosul makes rough

brutality the secret of ISIS's domination. In his book *The Digital Caliphate*, Abdel Bari Atwan, however, describes (in Malise Ruthven's words) "a well-run organization that combines bureaucratic efficiency and military expertise with a sophisticated use of information technology."³ Zaid Al-Ali, in his excellent account of Tikrit, talks about ISIS's "incapacity to govern" and the total collapse of water supply, electricity, and schools, and ultimately population under its rule.⁴ "Explanations" that refer to resources and power are ultimately circular. The fact that the movement has been able to attract the apparent support, or acquiescence, of the local population, and control territory, local government revenue, oil, historical sites, and military bases, has been a result of the movement's success and its monopoly of the insurgency. It is not a cause of it.

In *ISIS: The State of Terror*, Stern and Berger provide a fascinating analysis of the movement's use of video and social media. They have tracked individual Twitter accounts, showing how users kept changing their Twitter handles, piggybacked on the World Cup by inserting images of beheadings into the soccer chat, and created new apps and automated bots to boost their numbers. Stern and Berger show that at least 45,000 pro-movement accounts were

²See "ISIS and the Shia Revival in Iraq," *The New York Review*, June 4, 2015.

³See "Inside the Islamic State," *The New York Review*, July 9, 2015.

⁴See "Tikrit: Iraq's Abandoned City," *NYRblog*, May 4, 2015.

online in late 2014, and describe how their users attempted to circumvent Twitter administrators by changing their profile pictures from the movement's flags to kittens. But this simply raises the more fundamental question of why the movement's ideology and actions—however slickly produced and communicated—have had popular appeal in the first place.

Nor have there been any more satisfying explanations of what draws the 20,000 foreign fighters who have joined the movement. At first, the large number who came from Britain were blamed on the British government having made insufficient effort to assimilate immigrant communities; then France's were blamed on the government pushing too hard for assimilation. But in truth, these new foreign fighters seemed to sprout from every conceivable political or economic system. They came from very poor countries (Yemen and Afghanistan) and from the wealthiest countries in the world (Norway and Qatar). Analysts who have argued that foreign fighters are created by social exclusion, poverty, or inequality should acknowledge that they emerge as much from the social democracies of Scandinavia as from monarchies (a thousand from Morocco), military states (Egypt), authoritarian democracies (Turkey), and liberal democracies (Canada). It didn't seem to matter whether a government had freed thousands of Islamists (Iraq), or locked them up (Egypt), whether it refused to allow an Islamist party to win an election (Algeria) or allowed an Islamist party to be elected. Tunisia, which had the most successful transition from the Arab Spring to an elected Islamist government, nevertheless produced more foreign fighters than any other country.

Nor was the surge in foreign fighters driven by some recent change in domestic politics or in Islam. Nothing fundamental had shifted in the background of culture or religious belief between 2012, when there were almost none of these foreign fighters in Iraq, and 2014, when there were 20,000. The only change is that there was suddenly a territory available to attract and house them. If the movement had not seized Raqqa and Mosul, many of these men might well have simply continued to live out their lives with varying degrees of strain—as Normandy dairy farmers or council employees in Cardiff. We are left again with tautology—ISIS exists because it can exist—they are there because they're there.

Finally, a year ago, it seemed plausible to attach much of the blame for the rise of the movement to former Iraqi prime minister al-Maliki's disastrous administration of Iraq. No longer. Over the last year, a new, more constructive, moderate, and inclusive leader, Haider al-Abadi, has been appointed prime minister; the Iraqi army has been restructured under a new Sunni minister of defense; the old generals have been removed; and foreign governments have competed to provide equipment and training. Some three thousand US advisers and trainers have appeared in Iraq. Formidable air strikes and detailed surveillance have been provided by the United States, the United Kingdom, and others. The Iranian Quds force, the Gulf states, and the Kurdish Peshmerga have joined the fight on the ground.

For all these reasons the movement was expected to be driven back and lose

Mosul in 2015. Instead, in May, it captured Palmyra in Syria and—almost simultaneously—Ramadi, three hundred miles away in Iraq. In Ramadi, three hundred ISIS fighters drove out thousands of trained and heavily equipped Iraqi soldiers. The US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter observed:

The Iraqi forces just showed no will to fight. They were not outnumbered. In fact, they vastly outnumbered the opposing force, and yet they failed to fight.

The movement now controls a "terrorist state" far more extensive and far more developed than anything that George W. Bush evoked at the height of the "Global War on Terror." Then, the possibility of Sunni extremists taking over the Iraqi province of Anbar was used to justify a surge of 170,000 US troops and the expenditure of over \$100 billion a year. Now, years after the surge, ISIS controls not only Anbar, but also Mosul and half of the territory of Syria. Its affiliates control large swaths of northern Nigeria and significant areas of Libya. Hundreds of thousands have now been killed and millions displaced; horrors unimaginable even to the Taliban—among them the reintroduction of forcible rape of minors and slavery—have been legitimized. And this catastrophe has not only dissolved the borders between Syria and Iraq, but provoked the forces that now fight the proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran in Yemen.

The clearest evidence that we do not understand this phenomenon is our consistent inability to predict—still less control—these developments. Who predicted that Zaqawi would grow in strength after the US destroyed his training camps in 2001? It seemed unlikely to almost everyone that the movement would regroup so quickly after his death in 2006, or again after the surge in 2007. We now know more and more facts about the movement and its members, but this did not prevent most analysts from believing as recently as two months ago that the defeats in Kobane and Tikrit had tipped the scales against the movement, and that it was unlikely to take Ramadi. We are missing something.

Part of the problem may be that commentators still prefer to focus on political, financial, and physical explanations, such as anti-Sunni discrimination, corruption, lack of government services in captured territories, and ISIS's use of violence. Western audiences are, therefore, rarely forced to focus on ISIS's bewildering ideological appeal. I was surprised when I saw that even a Syrian opponent of ISIS was deeply moved by a video showing how ISIS destroyed the "Sykes-Picot border" between Iraq and Syria, established since 1916, and how it went on to reunite divided tribes. I was intrigued by the condemnation issued by Ahmed al-Tayeb, the grand imam of al-Azhar—one of the most revered Sunni clerics in the world: "This group is Satanic—they should have their limbs amputated or they should be crucified." I was taken aback by bin Laden's elegy for Zaqawi: his "story will live forever with the stories of the nobles.... Even if we lost one of our greatest knights and princes, we are happy that we have found a symbol...."

But the "ideology" of ISIS is also an insufficient explanation. Al-Qaeda understood better than anyone the peculiar blend of Koranic verses, Arab nationalism, crusader history, poetic reference, sentimentalism, and horror that can animate and sustain such movements. But even its leaders thought that Zaqawi's particular approach was irrational, culturally inappropriate, and unappealing. In 2005, for example, al-Qaeda leaders sent messages advising Zaqawi to stop publicizing his horrors. They used modern strategy jargon—"more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media"—and told him that the "lesson" of Afghanistan was that the Taliban had lost because they had relied—like Zaqawi—on too narrow a sectarian base. And the al-Qaeda leaders were not the only Salafi jihadists who assumed that their core supporters preferred serious religious teachings to snuff videos (just as al-Tayeb apparently assumed that an Islamist movement would not burn a Sunni Arab pilot alive in a cage).

Much of what ISIS has done clearly contradicts the moral intuitions and principles of many of its supporters. And we sense—through Hassan Hassan and Michael Weiss's careful interviews—that its supporters are at least partially aware of this contradiction. Again, we can list the different external groups that have provided funding and support to ISIS. But there are no logical connections of ideology, identity, or interests that should link Iran, the Taliban, and the Baathists to one another or to ISIS. Rather, each case suggests that institutions that are starkly divided in theology, politics, and culture per-

petually improvise lethal and even self-defeating partnerships of convenience.

The thinkers, tacticians, soldiers, and leaders of the movement we know as ISIS are not great strategists; their policies are often haphazard, reckless, even preposterous; regardless of whether their government is, as some argue, skillful, or as others imply, hapless, it is not delivering genuine economic growth or sustainable social justice. The theology, principles, and ethics of the ISIS leaders are neither robust nor defensible. Our analytical spade hits bedrock very fast.

I have often been tempted to argue that we simply need more and better information. But that is to underestimate the alien and bewildering nature of this phenomenon. To take only one example, five years ago not even the most austere Salafi theorists advocated the reintroduction of slavery; but ISIS has in fact imposed it. Nothing since the triumph of the Vandals in Roman North Africa has seemed so sudden, incomprehensible, and difficult to reverse as the rise of ISIS. None of our analysts, soldiers, diplomats, intelligence officers, politicians, or journalists has yet produced an explanation rich enough—even in hindsight—to have predicted the movement's rise.

We hide this from ourselves with theories and concepts that do not bear deep examination. And we will not remedy this simply through the accumulation of more facts. It is not clear whether our culture can ever develop sufficient knowledge, rigor, imagination, and humility to grasp the phenomenon of ISIS. But for now, we should admit that we are not only horrified but baffled. □

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The Riders of the Waves

Alice Gregory



Professional surfer Anthony Walsh, Teahupoo, Tahiti, April 2009

Barbarian Days: A Surfing Life

by William Finnegan.
Penguin, 447 pp., \$27.95

There's a passage near the beginning of *Middlemarch* in which the narrator describes the view out of a carriage window that depicts, better than anything I've ever read, the pleasure of knowing a place intimately. "Little details gave each field a particular physiognomy, dear to the eyes that have looked on them from childhood," George Eliot writes. She goes on to cite a list of beloved natural features: trees that lean in a certain way, abrupt slopes, a bald spot in a pasture.

These are the things that make the gamut of joy in landscape to [the area's] souls—the things they toddled among, or perhaps learned by heart standing between their father's knees while he drove leisurely.

This capacity for geographical familiarity—knowing exactly where the neighbor's fence warps slightly—is a visceral kind of knowledge, gained organically, and it atrophies as we age. Learning a place by heart is a luxury rarely afforded to adults, and unless absolutely forced to, one seldom even notices that the ability has been lost.

In his new book, the *New Yorker* staff writer and veteran war reporter William Finnegan demonstrates the advantages of keeping meticulous mental maps. For him, memorizing a place is a matter of nostalgia, of metaphysical well-being, but also of life and death. Finnegan's memoir is not about his professional life reporting on blood-soaked Sudan or Bosnia or Nicaragua; it's about the "disabling enchantment" that is his lifelong hobby.

"The close, painstaking study of a tiny patch of coast, every eddy and angle, even down to individual rocks,

and in every combination of tide and wind and swell... is the basic occupation of surfers at their local break," he writes in *Barbarian Days: A Surfing Life*. Surfers, like children, naturally develop sensory affinity for their surroundings: they can detect minor changes in the smell of the sea, track daily the rise and fall of sandbars, are grateful for particularly sturdy roots onto which they can grab when scurrying down bluffs. The environment becomes an almost anatomical extension of them, mostly because it has to.

Unlike football or baseball or even boxing, surfing is a literarily impoverished sport. The reasons for this are practical. It's not a spectator sport: it is hard to see surfers from the shore. That the best waves are seldom anywhere near civilization makes it an activity especially resistant to journalism, and first-rate writing by surfers is also rare: the impulse to surf—a "special brand of monomania," Finnegan calls it—is at direct odds with the indoor obligations of writing.

In many ways this is true for any athletic activity—that its very best practitioners will very seldom be the same people who document it—but it's particularly true of surfing, which demands more traveling, logistical planning, and waiting around than any other athletic endeavor. Even when surfers are not surfing, they're thinking about it: listening to buoy reports, peering off cliffs with binoculars, preventing themselves from buying new boards.

Though middle school students have worn surfwear-branded clothing for decades now and surfing has become increasingly popular among the billionaires of Santa Clara County, it remains an elusive pastime in the minds of most everyone who has never done it. The reasons for this too are practi-

cal. Appropriate beaches are rare; high schools don't have teams; and while not as prohibitively expensive as skiing, surfing requires roughly the same amount of cumbersome gear and is, if possible, even more physically uncomfortable. There are the damp, mildewed wetsuits; the feet cut by coral; the sunburns and the salt-stung eyes. Pair all this with the specter of Jeff Spicoli (the surfer and pot smoker played by Sean Penn in the 1982 film *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*) and the easy-to-imitate accent, and you have a hobby that is easy to mock, if not ignore. It's certainly not a pastime anyone associates with ambition or mental agility.

Which is precisely what makes the propulsive precision of Finnegan's writing so surprising and revelatory. For over half a century at this point, readers have taken it as a given (and writers as a professional prerogative) that low-brow culture is deserving of bookish analysis. But unlike so many writhing attempts to extort meaning from topics that seem intellectually bankrupt, Finnegan's treatment of surfing never feels like performance. Through the sheer intensity of his descriptive powers and the undeniable ways in which surfing has shaped his life, *Barbarian Days* is an utterly convincing study in the joy of treating seriously an unserious thing.

"Getting a spot wired—truly understanding it—can take years," Finnegan writes, continuing, later, to say that "all surfers are oceanographers." Over the course of a life spent in and out of the water, he has amassed a truly staggering amount of applied knowledge, of marine biology and carpentry and cartography. Surfing requires kinetic intuition, physical fitness, and courage in the face of an indifferent force, but it also demands the sort of mental work we don't typically associate with extreme sports. Any good writing about

an underexamined way of life must be, at least at times, expository, and Finnegan is lucid when it comes to the necessary task of explaining to the uninitiated some of the most basic tenets of surfing: why waves break where they do; how it's possible to stand on a floating piece of fiberglass, go into a moving tube of water, and emerge looking just as you did upon entry. But despite all this, surfing, as Finnegan renders it, is more than just a fun physical activity: it's a way of being in the world, with its own private politics and etiquette and benchmarks of success.

Dedicated surfing, as Finnegan himself admits, is "antisocial and ill-balanced." Unsurprisingly, it's often described as an addiction. The racial and generational diversity of a surf lineup resembles nothing so much as the crowds of bewilderingly miscellaneous-seeming people who assemble outside methadone clinics. The men with whom Finnegan surfs share, if not biographical similarities or income brackets, an obsession that is "radical in its rejection of the values of duty and conventional achievement." They include a blond Ecuadorian named Jose, Australian teenagers with sun-induced cataracts, a geophysicist, Republican contractors from Florida, a modern dancer, an oncologist, and "some young maniac from Oregon." (Finnegan has a charming tendency to remind us of his amphibious friends with refrains that recur through the book: "the landscape painter from Wales," "Steve, who loved the Kinks.") Surfing, as he successfully illustrates, can be an escape from the class antagonism that infuses so many moments of life on land.

It can also be a backdrop to a unique brand of companionship—among men, specifically, which, unlike female friendship, is not often tackled in books.

The adoration with which Finnegan writes about his fellow surfers is of a sort usually seen only in soldiers' memoirs. Bill was "aggressively relaxed—the essential California oxy-moron." Glenn "moved with unusual elegance." Finnegan writes that "chasing waves remains for me a proximate cause of vivid friendships." That they are often forged despite unpleasant obstacles (tropical diseases, food poisoning, near drowning) adds a kinetic dimension to what would otherwise be merely interior, emotional dynamics. And as Finnegan admits, "male egos were always subtly, or otherwise, on the line."

Reputations are made and maintained in the ocean, but they're premised on more than just talent. Seniority, humility, pain tolerance, and a hundred other factors contribute to a surfer's local eminence. Speech patterns are just one of the outward signs of the insular social order that attends the sport. Surfers speak in a vivid vernacular: a mix of esoteric oceanographic detail and play-by-play narration expressed in slang. Finnegan is, of course, fluent—in it but also in the language of literature. The adjectives he attributes to waves are alternately the kind one might find in a contemporary novel—hideous, boiling, miraculous, malignant, mechanical—and the sort overheard in rusted-out pickup trucks—rifling, peaky, shifty, hairy, meaty, stupid. On the elemental aspects of surfing, Finnegan is especially capable of coming up with phrases that are at once poetic and concrete. Though "surfers have a perfection fetish.... Waves are not stationary objects in nature like roses or diamonds." They are, instead, at once "the object of your deepest desire and adoration" but also "your adversary, your nemesis, even your mortal enemy." Riding them is "the theoretical solution to an impossibly complex problem."

Just after his sixtieth birthday, Finnegan caught a pair of waves in Hawaii that were as perfectly hollow and long-lasting as anything he had ridden for thirty years. Getting "barreled" is the term surfers use for the experience of being physically inside of a wave, moving along the face as the lip cascades down from above. It is an act so magical and strange that it almost seems as though no mortal should be able to do it. "Being adjacent to that much beauty—more than adjacent; immersed in, pierced by it—was the point," he writes. "The physical risks were footnotes."

Among the most striking features of Finnegan's prose are the moments when he drops all pretense of tasteful diction. On one page, he'll describe the ocean water in Honolulu as having "hues in its depths so intense they felt like first editions—ocean colors never seen before, made solely for this wave, this moment, perhaps never to be seen again." And then on another he writes that the ocean's "color was a muted gray-white until a wave reared; then turquoise floodlights seemed to switch on, illuminating the wave's guts from the inside."

Finnegan's humor, which is subtle but constant, is often descriptive: held-back junior high students who "looked, really, like sanitation workers who had just finished work and were looking forward to that first beer," a friend whose parents had "already checked out on

raising kids, moved on to some internal Florida," his middle-aged fear of turning into a "pear-shaped pillar of suet." He also sometimes embraces, brilliantly, a traditional but deadpan setup: a protracted account of a boy urinating in Finnegan's mouth ends simply with "I stopped hanging around with him."

Barbarian Days is organized more geographically than chronologically, and it describes an unfathomable life. Finnegan's childhood was spent between Southern California and Hawaii, where his classmates went to school without shoes and the cafeteria served chow fun. Geckos climbed the walls; sliced pineapple was sold on the street; Chinese women in conical straw hats collected octopus in the reefs. His life there "felt makeshift, barely American." Finnegan was tracked academically with Japanese girls, who also got good grades, and he spent recesses trying to escape a kind of schoolyard violence "that seems archaic now." Moving to Hawaii from Southern California snapped him out of "a lifetime of unconscious whiteness." His childhood memories paint a melancholy portrait of middle-class life as a once-plausibly pleasant reality. Though by no means wealthy, Finnegan's family was comfortable and materially satisfied in ways that his father's work (as an electrician, then carpenter, then gas station attendant) would not permit today.

Finnegan skips his high school graduation to travel with a girlfriend to Europe, returns to California to work on a railroad, and then escapes the "disco-dulled, energy-crisis America" of the mid-1970s with a friend and heads to the South Pacific to surf. They learn Spanish so they can speak in secret if they have to and travel to atolls only accessible by an airline run at the whim of a 440-pound Micronesian king. They live on limited amounts of potable water, surf waves that feel "like a test of faith, or a test of sanity, or an enormous, undeserved gift," and swim among fish "so pointlessly gorgeous I found myself groaning in my snorkel."

One of the book's oddest features is the off-handedness with which Finnegan refers to the other, non-surfing aspects of his life. Throughout his cross-continental travels, he alludes casually to a master's degree earned in the Midwest, an abandoned thousand-page novel, and magazine features he filed from abroad to American periodicals. Surfing, he writes, "contributed little to how I saw myself." On the face of it, this admission seems fully implausible: Finnegan, according to this book, surfs constantly and arranges his life so as to maximize his time in the water. What he writes is believable only because the quality of his prose and the rigor of his thinking is so high, and we believe him when he describes surfing as a salve for the mentally, emotionally, and sometimes even physically taxing work of serious journalism, "some battered remnant of childhood that kept drifting incongruously into the foreground of my days."

From Oceania he and his friend travel to Australia proper, where they're surprised to learn that surfing is a popular and populist pastime with no connotation of rebellion or derelict priorities, and then to Bangkok, where Finnegan contracts malaria (he pays

the hospital bill with forged traveler's checks). "We had been gone so long now," he writes, "that I felt unmoored from all possible explanations for this trip. It was certainly no longer a vacation." Somehow, improbably but not disingenuously, Finnegan worries that he's wasting his youth. Cape Town follows Southeast Asia. There, he gets a job teaching black high school kids in apartheid-era South Africa. He continues to surf—the region has some of the best waves in the world—but it felt "vaguely embarrassing, almost ignominious" at a time and place where "there was simply no escaping politics."

When Finnegan finally returns to the States, the America he finds is one of newfangled answering machines and successful peers. He settles in San Francisco, and in surfing inhabits a "world invisible" to his neighbors. He meets the woman who will become his wife, and they eventually move to New York City for her job. Finnegan's professional writing becomes more serious, and his trips to embattled nations more frequent. Still, between months spent enmeshed in geopolitical strife, he surfs. If there's anything missing from this book it's an acknowledgment of the internal conflict between professionalism and pleasure, a catalog of instances when work prevented him from surfing or of times when he chose aquatic joy instead of the responsibilities of the shore.

Barbarian Days, like so many memoirs, reads like less of an autobiography about surfing than an account of an enviable and obsolete way of life.

Finnegan is an undeniably successful person who twice dropped out of college, refused to have a checking account until the age of thirty-one, and didn't live at a single address for longer than fifteen months for the first decade and a half of his adult life. It's inimitable today. Finnegan seems to understand this himself, which is what prevents the book from ever sounding generationally smug. The book is a corrective to the countless Op-Eds that would like us to believe the endlessly bandied-about concept of "the extended adolescence" is both especially contemporary and socially malignant. Finnegan was refusing to professionalize decades ago, and he seems to have turned out more than fine.

He has written the oddly uncommon story of a life shaped by leisure. *Barbarian Days* is a motivated memoir: it explains why Finnegan is who he is, and how he got to do the things that he's done. Surfing, in the most basic of ways, determined for decades where in the world he was at a given time, and with whom he spoke and laughed and ate. How a person spends his free time—what he chooses to do when he can do anything at all—is one of the most important things about him. But *Barbarian Days* is less an ode to independence than a celebration of deliberate constriction, of making choices that determine what you think about and who you know. Surfing demands intuition and familiarity with one's surroundings but it does not allow for the perceptive disregard that so often accompanies deep knowledge. As Finnegan demonstrates, surfing, like good writing, is an act of vigilant noticing. □

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China: The Superpower of Mr. Xi

Roderick MacFarquhar

The Governance of China

by Xi Jinping.
Beijing: Foreign Languages Press,
515 pp., \$16.95 (paper)

Chinese Politics in the Era of Xi Jinping: Renaissance, Reform, or Retrogression?

by Willy Wo-Lap Lam.
Routledge, 323 pp.,
\$145.00; \$50.95 (paper)

In the almost one-hundred-year existence of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), its current general secretary, Xi Jinping, is only the second leader clearly chosen by his peers. The first was Mao Zedong. Both men beat out the competition, and thus secured a legitimacy their predecessors lacked.¹ Why was Xi chosen?

The Beijing rumor mill had long indicated that the outgoing elders were looking for a “princeling” successor, that is the son of a senior first-generation revolutionary. Princelings, it was apparently felt, had a bigger stake in the revolution than most people, and thus would be the most determined to preserve the rule of the CCP.

Xi's father, Xi Zhongxun, was a respected vice-premier and member of the CCP Central Committee known for his moderate views, but he fell afoul of Mao in 1962 and was purged, then was rehabilitated and returned to high office after the Chairman's death. Xi Jinping thus has the additional legitimization of being “born red,” as Evan Osnos put it recently in *The New Yorker*.

Doubtless this heritage partly accounts for Xi's evident self-confidence, but another factor could be the toughening he underwent as a young teenager, fending for himself in the face of hostile Red Guards and thereafter working in the countryside for six years. According to an official biography, “he arrived at the village as a slightly lost teenager and left as a 22-year-old man determined to do something for the people.” Unlike his predecessors Jiang Zemin, who had the benefit of studying in the Soviet bloc and then rising through the relative stability of the industrial bureaucracy, and Hu Jintao, who started in the industrial bureaucracy and then made his way up the ranks of the Communist Youth League, Xi had no such protective carapace in his early years. That background could explain why Xi has been taking far greater risks after

¹Before Mao, leaders were effectively chosen by the Comintern's agents in China. On the Long March, the Comintern representative was sidelined and Mao emerged as leader-to-be. Thereafter potential successors were chosen by Mao; even Deng, despite being purged twice during the Cultural Revolution, was effectively chosen by Mao, for it was he who was brought back to power by the Chairman when Zhou Enlai was dying, an indication to all that Deng was the only man with the ability to run the country. After Mao, Deng did the picking. Hu Jintao, Xi's predecessor, was Deng's last pick. Additional footnotes appear in the Web version of this article at www.nybooks.com.

Xi Jinping



becoming general secretary than either Jiang or Hu did. What is widely accepted among China hands is that Xi is the most powerful leader of China since Deng Xiaoping, with a developing personality cult.

Xi is not *primus inter pares* like Jiang and Hu; he is simply *primus*. In his recent book, *Chinese Politics in the Era of Xi Jinping*, Willy Wo-Lap Lam, a veteran observer of Chinese elites, explains that since taking over as general secretary in November 2012 and president of China in March 2013, Xi has centralized power under his leadership to an extraordinary degree, creating and chairing the new Central National Security Commission, which has jurisdiction over the army, the police, and all foreign-related and national security agencies, along with chairing the Central Military Commission, which comes with his job as CCP general secretary. In a move that surely undercuts the regime's second-ranking member, Premier Li Keqiang, supposedly the economic czar, Xi has created and taken the chair of a new Central Leading Group on Comprehensively Deepening Reforms. Xi has also taken on the leadership of central leading groups on foreign affairs, Internet security, and information technology.

In fact, Xi is arguably even more powerful than Deng was, though Lam does not suggest this. In promoting his reform program, Deng had to bob and weave under pressure from equally senior colleagues who disliked reform. The only possible threat to Xi could have been his fellow princeling Bo Xilai, but he had been conveniently

purged by Hu Jintao in a lurid case that involved his wife's murder of a foreigner. Xi's current colleagues in the Politburo and its Standing Committee (PSC), passed over for the top job, seem less of a threat than the charismatic Bo might have been.

The Sisyphean task that Xi has set himself is to stamp out corruption in the CCP. Both Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao had warned about the dangers arising from this pervasive problem. According to Hu, failure to eradicate corruption could “deal a body blow to the Party and even lead to the collapse of the Party and country.” Xi has echoed Jiang and Hu, saying that “upholding integrity and combating corruption are vital for the survival of the Party and the state.” On another occasion he emulated Mao by quoting from an ancient philosopher: “Many worms will disintegrate wood, and a big enough crack will lead to the collapse of a wall.” But in contrast with the efforts of Jiang and Hu to stem corruption, Xi has launched a very high-profile campaign. In his words: “We should fight corruption with strong determination, . . . persevere in our anticorruption effort till we achieve final success rather than start off full of sound and fury and then taper off in a whimper.” He may come to regret promising not to end with a whimper.

Xi had been preaching the need to fight corruption long before he became Party leader. At an antigraft conference in 2004, he warned officials: “Rein in your spouses, children, rela-

tives, friends and staff, and vow not to use power for personal gain.” Xi knew of what he spoke. His sister and her family were accumulating investments worth hundreds of millions of dollars while he was rising up the ranks of the leadership, though Western investigative reporters found no evidence that Xi's immediate family was involved in any way. Nor was this an isolated case among the top leadership. Shortly before Wen Jiabao retired as premier in March 2013, it was reported, by another Western news source, that his family, including his mother, wife, children, and siblings, were rich to the tune of \$2.7 billion. Such foreign investigative reports require months of painstaking research, but within the top ranks of the CCP, knowledge of the riches of other leaders' families must be easier to come by.

To deal with corruption, Xi has put Wang Qishan, a trusted, longtime colleague, drawn from the seven-member Politburo Standing Committee, in charge of the Party's Central Discipline Inspection Committee (CDIC). The committee's remit is to pursue both “tigers” and “flies,” to root out corruption at all levels. In 2014, Wang's investigators' work resulted in over 71,000 officials being punished for violating the eight-point anticorruption rules. Many doubtless were guilty only of living high off the hog on the public purse, not confining their banquets to “four dishes and a soup,” the traditional CCP measure of restraint. But dozens of senior officials have been dismissed; in one province, the ranks of the Party have been decimated from top to bottom. Perhaps the CDIC's biggest achievement last year was to repatriate five hundred fugitive officials from abroad and recover almost \$500 million of their ill-gotten gains. Wang hopes to persuade even countries like the US, with which China has no extradition treaty, to assist him in this endeavor.

The prime tiger to be bagged so far is Zhou Yongkang, a member of the ruling Politburo Standing Committee until he had to retire for age reasons in 2012. He had been in charge of the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission, supervising the security apparatus and law enforcement, including the police, paramilitary forces, and domestic intelligence: not the profile of one easily purged even in retirement. So before arresting him, the CDIC cut the ground from under his feet by rounding up his subordinates in the provincial and state organizations he had run. Last month, Zhou was sentenced to life in prison, the most senior official to be purged for corruption in the history of the People's Republic.

Up till this point, there seemed to have been a comradely agreement that former members of the Politburo Standing Committee were to be allowed to retire in peace, so senior Chinese officials may hope that Zhou has really been arrested for factional reasons rather than corruption, having been a supporter of the purged Bo Xilai, Xi Jinping's onetime rival princeling. In that case, past and future ex-PSC members could breathe more

easily. But if Zhou turns out not to be the last tiger but the first, then existing tensions in the top ranks of the Party will rise. Mao's colleagues were too afraid of him to unite against him even when they were falling like ninepins in the Cultural Revolution: besides, to have brought down Mao—the Lenin and Stalin of the revolution—would have deprived the CCP of its legitimacy. Xi does not have that stature, so to continue his tiger hunt will require nerve.

Like Mao before him, Xi relies on the People's Liberation Army (PLA) as his last line of defense. A year ago, eighteen leading active-service generals, including the officers commanding central PLA departments and the seven regional commanders, swore their loyalty to Xi as chairman of the CCP's Military Affairs Commission. But this demonstration that the PLA had his back was a sign of weakness as well as strength. Mao had no need for so public a demonstration of military loyalty. And since the anticorruption campaign has already targeted some senior generals, including a former vice-chairman of the Military Affairs Commission and Politburo member—as high as a soldier can get—these eighteen pledges may have been designed as keep-out-of-jail cards. It remains to be seen how loyal the generals stay if the campaign targets more top brass.

Swatting flies also involves considerable risks. In many ways, it is a more important task than bagging tigers. Chinese citizens may cheer as another tiger is laid low, but it is the flies, the lower-level cadres, whose predatory activities affect their everyday lives. If corruption among the well over 80 million Party members is as widespread as Chinese leaders imply and the Chinese people believe, then tens of millions could be involved.

Suppose that only 10 percent of grassroots Party cadres are corrupt, almost certainly a gross underestimate: that's 8 million people. Then add in family members, who the Wen Jiabao case suggests may well also be corrupt. With a spouse, the figure becomes 16 million; add in a child, 24 million; add in a sibling, 32 million; and with the sibling's spouse, one has 40 million people who should be prosecuted. And that's with only a 10 percent corruption rate. Party morale would crumble along with its organizational strength, as it did during the Cultural Revolution. Already, compulsory visits by officials to incarcerated colleagues must be intimidating.

Indeed, Xi is attempting a cultural revolution of his own. Whereas Mao wanted to make Chinese leaders revolutionary, Xi wants to make them righteous,

because moral purity is essential for Marxist parties to stay pure, and moral integrity is a fundamental trait for officials to remain clean, honest and upright.

In the 1980s, party officials jumped on Deng Xiaoping's "to get rich is glorious" bandwagon and many used their positions for corruption.

Under Mao, those officials had been told to "serve the people," but Mao had betrayed them by making them the victims of Red Guard violence during the Cultural Revolution. Corruption, be-

ginning in the Deng era but far worse now, was a payback for what they had endured. Now Xi wants to withdraw that perk of Party membership. Will Party members fall into line or seek to subvert the campaign? What will be the impact on potential Party members?

This problem is exacerbated by Xi's lack of any persuasive ideology to enthrone Party members. He has conjured up the "Chinese dream," the "rejuvenation of the Chinese nation," and according to an official document from the CCP's Central Committee, "we are... rapidly arousing mass fervor, proclaiming that socialism with Chinese characteristics and the Chinese dream are the main theme of our age." But the Chinese dream is too distant to arouse "mass fervor" among citizens whose personal dream is to be able to afford an urban apartment or their son getting a good job after college. As for "socialism with Chinese characteristics," Deng Xiaoping's justification for putting Marxism on the shelf, any educated Chinese knows that the nearest facsimile to that can be found only in Singapore. Taiwan could be labeled democracy with Chinese characteristics. Capitalism with Chinese characteristics? Hong Kong. And China? 1.3 billion people with Chinese characteristics. There is no ideological there there.

Neither the "Chinese dream" nor "socialism with Chinese characteristics" has the intellectual plausibility of Marxism-Leninism, and certainly does not arouse the mass fervor of Mao Zedong Thought at its height. Marxism-Leninism, like Confucianism, was a philosophy that embraced state and society, that guided officials and prescribed rules for families. It was a doctrine that glued cadres and people together. But however much Chinese leaders proclaim that Marxism-Leninism is still their lodestar, and Xi Jinping proposes the study of Marxism in institutions of higher learning, in practice the works of Paul Samuelson and his successors are far more relevant to officials who seek to engineer the Chinese dream than those of Marx and Engels. Chinese who seek something to fill the spiritual void have turned in their tens of millions to a different Western doctrine, Christianity. The spread of a Western religion is a prime example of the problems that face Xi in his avowed aim to keep out Western doctrines, though the Party seems confident of containing it with a policy of knocking off crosses and knocking down churches.

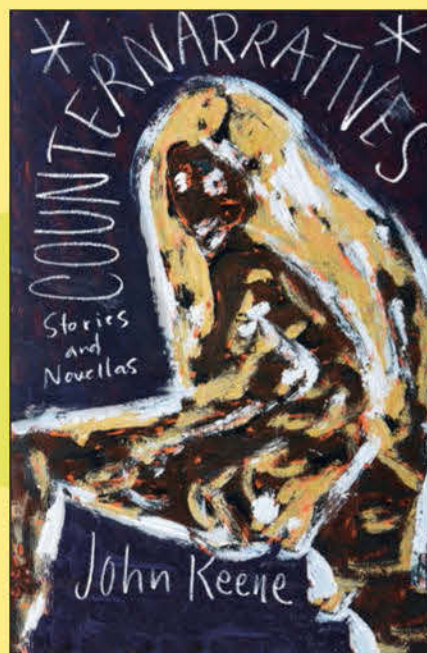
Without a substantive positive ideology to grip the Chinese people, Xi has been forced to go negative, listing alien doctrines to be extirpated. According to a central Party document, there are six "false ideological trends, positions, and activities" emanating from the West that are advocated by dissident Chinese: constitutional democracy; universal values; civil society; economic neoliberalism; Western-style journalism, challenging China's principle that the media and the publishing system should be subject to Party discipline; and promoting historical nihilism, trying to undermine the history of the CCP by emphasizing the mistakes of the Maoist period.

There is nothing particularly surprising about this listing except for its confirmation of the extent to which

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“opening up” has resulted in the spread of Western values among Chinese citizens. But the sixth concern, “historical nihilism,” is a particular worry of Xi’s, connected with his understandable obsession with preventing the CCP going the way of the Soviet Communist Party. He believes the rot started in the Soviet Union when Party leader Nikita Khrushchev denounced Stalin’s record in 1956, thereby dividing Soviet history into a bad era (Stalin’s) and a good one (post-Stalin).

For Xi, it was historical nihilism to write off the Maoist period, with its Great Leap famine and its Cultural Revolution—“the devastation that Mao left in his wake,” as Andrew Walder puts it in his major new book, *China Under Mao: A Revolution Derailed*²—as all bad, for he fears that would ultimately mean denigrating Mao, and, as his portrait on Tiananmen demonstrates, the Chairman is still the legitimator of the regime.

According to Xi, an important reason why the Soviet Union disintegrated and the Soviet Communist Party collapsed was that

their ideals and convictions wavered.... Finally, all it took was one quiet word from Gorbachev to declare the dissolution of the Soviet Communist Party, and a great party was gone.... In the end nobody was a real man, nobody came out to resist.

Xi clearly intends that the members of the CCP should have their ideals and convictions strengthened and he will be the “real man” who will lead the resistance to infiltrating Western doctrines.

What Xi did not acknowledge was that when Gorbachev came to power in 1985, his aim was to revive the Party and the country after two decades of corruption and stagnation under Brezhnev. He believed in communism, state ownership, and central planning, probably more deeply than Xi. Like Deng Xiaoping, Gorbachev launched reform (perestroika) and opening up (glasnost). But unlike in China, the Soviet bureaucracy had been in power for many decades and had not been terrorized and undermined by a cultural revolution. Resistance to perestroika was strong, even within the Politburo. Glasnost became the more important route for changing the Soviet system, and authors and journalists exploited their new freedom. Hitherto banned books were published. Informal groups were set up in favor of perestroika. Public opinion became important. The regime came under open attack. And gradually Gorbachev became more radical in his effort to shock his countrymen into change. Ultimately, the Soviet Communist Party was dissolved and the Soviet Union fell apart.

Xi Jinping is as concerned as Gorbachev was to transform the Communist Party that he leads and to prevent the collapse of the People’s Republic.

²Harvard University Press, 2015.

The Soviet example proves to him that glasnost is not the way to go. With an estimated five hundred demonstrations a day across China, 60 percent of them provoked by “land grabs” by local officials, opening the door further must seem imprudent. Rather, closing down has been the order of the day. The atmosphere in intellectual circles has become chillier than under Hu Jintao. Even anticorruption whistle-blowers are punished; Xi wants a centrally controlled campaign, not an unpredictable free-for-all.

So Xi has chosen his form of perestroika. In addition to the anticorruption campaign, it comprises

flies to paralyze the whole CCP.

Clearly Xi cannot want that. He has few options. He can gradually reduce the tempo of the anticorruption campaign, allow it to taper off, instruct Wang Qishan to send out fewer investigation teams, and to pursue only the most egregious sinners. Simultaneously he could tell the elite that they can keep what they have, but from now on any new instance of corruption will be punished severely. The tiger shoot would be over and the flies would go unharmed. Xi would have to accept the humiliation of ending the campaign with a “whimper.”

This would hardly be a satisfactory outcome. Citizens would know that the



President Xi Jinping, Central Discipline Inspection Committee Secretary Wang Qishan, and Premier Li Keqiang, Tiananmen Square, Beijing, September 2014

thoroughgoing economic reform. But almost forty years after the end of the Cultural Revolution, Chinese bureaucrats have recovered their self-confidence. Insofar as economic reform now will hurt their vested interests, including their power over the economy, they drag their feet. Local governments with no hope of increased central subsidies also are recalcitrant.

How foot dragging can work was illustrated in an outburst by China’s premier against ministers in April this year when he upbraided them for allowing cabinet decisions to become mired among their subordinates. A further factor, unmentioned by the premier, is probably a reluctance to take initiatives because of the anticorruption campaign.

If one compares this campaign to Gorbachev’s perestroika, the dangers to the system become apparent. Gorbachev had to use weapons of the weak: volunteer intellectuals from the ranks of journalists, editors, publishers, and academia. Xi, on the other hand, is using a powerful, long-established central party organization that can wreak havoc in any provincial or ministerial organization it selects. In Mao’s Cultural Revolution, victims were often chosen at random. Xi’s “cultural revolution” is anything but random, and since a high proportion of Party cadres are allegedly corrupt, they must all dread the arrival of a CDIC team in their area. In principle, there is nothing to stop the investigators from criticizing, dismissing, or indicting sufficient tigers and

rich and powerful had got away with it again. They would characterize the campaign as simply factional fighting at the top, as they will already have noticed that Xi’s campaign has so far not targeted any princelings. And they would continue to demonstrate against the flies. The “China dream” would be dismissed as a joke.

Alternatively, Xi can pursue the campaign vigorously, if not to the bitter end—which would never be reached—then at least for a few more years. The dangers are clear: a coup against him by fearful tigers; demoralization among the flies, the Party rank and file; the generals refusing to maintain their support as they, too, continue to be besieged by the CDIC.

Or Xi could try to divert attention, either by stoking the fires of nationalism with further provocative moves in the East and South China Seas or by folding anticorruption into a new campaign that would benefit both the people and the country. This would be an attack on the third great disaster that the CCP has visited upon the Chinese people, the degradation of the environment, a tragedy whose impact will be longer lasting than the famine or the Cultural Revolution. Since the land grabbed from peasants by officials is often sold to a polluting industry, corruption would still be targeted. And if Xi took the chair of a new National Environmental Protection Committee, finally a serious effort would be made to purify China’s earth, air, and water. □

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The New York Review of Books

Dennis Hastert: Victim

James Fenton

Between his indictment on May 28 and his court appearance on June 9, at which his lawyer entered pleas of innocence on his behalf, almost nothing was heard from Dennis Hastert, the former Republican Speaker of the House. He had been accused by the government of violating money-laundering laws and lying to the FBI about doing so. He had allegedly been withdrawing large sums from his own bank accounts, paying off a character referred to as Individual A, in compensation for some past “misconduct.” According to the indictment Hastert tried to evade requirements that withdrawals of over \$10,000 be reported to the government; and he lied to the FBI about his use of the money he had withdrawn.

Almost immediately after the indictment the authorities anonymously leaked the additional information that Individual A was male and that the misconduct was of a sexual kind. It had taken place, according to the leaks, when Hastert was a teacher and wrestling coach in Yorkville, Illinois, sometime between the years 1967 and 1981. The payments belonged to a much later period, beginning after a meeting with Individual A in 2010, two years after Hastert had joined a Washington law and lobbying firm. In other words, if Hastert’s past misdeed had involved a minor, the compensation arrangements were allowed to wait thirty-odd years until the Speaker had cashed in on his experience and contacts and become a very well-paid lobbyist.

The large sums of money allegedly demanded of Hastert—\$3.5 million, of which about half had already been paid—have convinced many people that a really disgraceful secret was being covered up. At that price, it must have been something truly—and here the writer instinctively reaches for a rare word—truly heinous. But we don’t know the facts and it seems unwise to calibrate the heinousness of the misdeed on a straightforward dollar scale. Hastert, confronted with this figure from his past, could have panicked in private, without recourse to sober advice. Or he could have made a cool, realistic assessment of his potential loss of future earnings if a relatively minor offense (for anyone else) undermined his reputation for probity, such as it was.

What is clear is that he quickly has been made an unperson. His lucrative jobs evaporated. There have been demands to remove his portrait from the Capitol. His name was removed from a public policy center at Wheaton College he had helped found. He became a byword for hypocrisy. The hush money could have been more about the desperate future he faced than the embarrassing past.

Some commentators have allowed their pens to run away with them. Here is Josh Marshall of *Talking Points Memo* on June 1: “Needless to say, I’m not trying to portray Hastert as a victim here. It seems very likely that he’s guilty of some very dark crimes.” I thought “very dark crimes” was language better reserved for Srebrenica or Babi Yar. And why is it needless to say that Marshall is not trying to portray Hastert as a victim? Hastert himself (it seems to have been the only thing

we have heard from him) is said to have told close friends that he was sorry people had to go through this ordeal. “I am a victim, too,” he told them.

This reported remark was treated with some derision at *Talking Points Memo* and elsewhere. Generally speaking, more effort has gone into imagining Hastert’s dark crimes than into picturing the activities of the extortioner, about whom amazingly little has surfaced. We know that Hastert mishandled the payment of the hush money, and an article in *Mother Jones* went so far as to explain various ways in which he could have made the payments and

person as Bruce). There must be many people out there who can make at least an educated guess about who he is. But neither his identity nor his behavior has hitherto been an issue. The federal prosecutors have obtained a court order to protect his anonymity; information “marked as sensitive” is to be kept under seal on the conclusion of the case. As a report summarized the court order: “The materials turned over in discovery should either be destroyed, returned to the government or retained in the defense counsel’s file still under seal.” There has been no sign that Individual A will face charges for black-

The statutes about structuring cash withdrawals, Dershowitz said, “were intended to prevent money laundering, to prevent drug dealing, to prevent income tax evasion.” But the payment of hush money is not illegal and it

is not within the heartland of what this statute was intended to cover. And then to have an indictment which essentially reveals that which Hastert was trying to conceal puts the government in the position of essentially being part of the blackmail—and it’s just not right.

Then there is the question of the lie that Hastert is alleged to have told. The indictment describes it like this: “Specifically, in response to the agents’ question confirming whether the purpose of the withdrawals was to store cash because he did not feel safe with the banking system, as he previously indicated, JOHN DENNIS HASTERT stated: ‘Yeah...I kept the cash. That’s what I’m doing.’” This is the response that, over and above the matter of the withdrawals themselves, could earn Hastert up to five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine for lying to the FBI. Essentially he was going along with a version of the facts that the agents themselves had put to him, based on something he had previously said (although exactly how he expressed himself earlier we are not told).

Hastert is in his mid-seventies. One could imagine that a certain panic had set in, and that the explanation offered by the agents seemed like a way out. One could also imagine a world in which Hastert had demanded to have a lawyer at his side before he replied. But if the case is not about an old man being blackmailed, but about allegations of sexual abuse long ago, then different rules seem to apply. (The sister of another student of Hastert’s, who is now dead, made such an allegation after the indictment.) We enter a much rougher world in which the accused is essentially on his own.

Here, for instance, is Jeffrey Toobin of *The New Yorker*:

While the payments to Individual A are probably legal, no prosecutor in the world is going to give the benefit of the doubt to someone who is making a payoff based on an apparent gross abuse of trust by a teacher against a student. It is exactly this kind of underlying fact that would—and should—motivate a prosecutor to proceed in a close case.

Here we see the scary quasi-legal process set forth and praised for its effectiveness. The “underlying fact” is the alleged “apparent gross abuse of trust by a teacher against a student”—even though that gross abuse of trust is not mentioned as such in the indictment, but only sketched out in the anonymous briefings of the press the next day. The indictment itself says that “during at least one of [their] meetings, Individual A and defendant discussed past misconduct by defendant against Individual A that had occurred years earlier”—and that Hastert “agreed to



John Boehner and Dennis Hastert at the unveiling of Hastert’s portrait at the Capitol, Washington, D.C., July 2009

escaped the notice of the law. He could have given Individual A a Picasso, for instance.

But what that article never considers is that perhaps Hastert made the cash payments in a bungling way because this is the way Individual A insisted they be made. We are told that Hastert inquired from a colleague about the possibility of setting up a substantial annuity. But perhaps Individual A did not want the money to be paid as an annuity, just as he did not want a Picasso or other valuable work of art, the selling of which he might find difficult. Perhaps, too, the risky and worrisome handing over of large sums of cash had its own punitive charm from the point of view of Individual A.

The invisibility of Individual A is itself very striking. It may be that we heard his voice in the clip to which C-SPAN drew attention after Hastert’s arrest. It comes from an appearance by Hastert on *Washington Journal* in November last year. The listener is identified as Bruce from Illinois. “Hello Denny,” he says cheerfully, and then “Remember me from Yorkville?” before laughing and apparently hanging up. Whoever this is, and whatever his motive in calling in, it is hard to believe that there are not many people out there who would recognize his voice and know exactly who Bruce is.

The same could be true of Individual A (whether or not he is the same

mail, or that his handling of large sums of cash—\$1.7 million by the time Hastert was indicted—has been held to be felonious in any respect. It is as if the large sums of money, as soon as they left Hastert’s hands, lost their radioactivity. They became uncontroversial in the eyes of the law.

What is Hastert being prosecuted for, and is it the same thing as what he is being punished for? If he is being punished for the large “structured” withdrawals of cash from his own bank accounts, then why should the involvement of Individual A not come under public scrutiny as well? The same question can be asked if he is being punished for lying: Was the correct answer to the FBI’s question “I was paying off Individual A”? It is only when one posits the hypothesis that Hastert is being punished for sexual abuse of a minor, many years ago, that the protection offered to Individual A makes sense. But it seems that that putative case cannot be brought to the court.

Very few people seem to have a problem with the idea that Hastert could be prosecuted for one thing and punished for another. Alan Dershowitz was among the few protesters:

This case just smells... I’m shocked that a prosecutor would allow this kind of case to be brought knowing that it will reveal the secrets, that it would open doors up to things that are alleged to have occurred almost half a century ago.

provide Individual A \$3.5 million to compensate for and conceal his prior misconduct against Individual A.”

Toobin informs us that Hastert told the FBI “two preposterous lies.” Here they are: “First, he said that he was

withdrawing the money to keep for his own use, even though he was passing it to Individual A.” Well, Toobin seems to have invented much of the wording here. The second preposterous lie: “And second, Hastert said that he re-

moved the cash from the bank because he did not feel safe with the American banking system—which is just absurd, especially for a former Speaker of the House.” Once again, this is not the response as it appears in the indictment,

which is only: “Yeah... I kept the cash. That’s what I’m doing.”

Two preposterous lies? Or one weak moment under pressure? Five years in prison for saying “Yeah... I kept the cash”? □

Staggering Local Wonderlands

Geoffrey O’Brien

The Musical Brain and Other Stories by César Aira, translated from the Spanish by Chris Andrews. New Directions, 351 pp., \$29.95

He had to keep fleeing forward, but to where? What would become of him? Was he destined to be an eternal fugitive, eternally forbidden to look back?

—*Shantytown*, 2001

The Argentinian writer César Aira’s stories tend to begin with a flat assertion. At its flattest this can be a statement of the most unthreatening ordinariness:

I was in a bus, sitting by the window, looking out at the street.

As a kid, in Pringles, I went to the movies a lot.

Sentences like this make up the primary layer of his writing, sentences that with minor variations might form part of any reader’s own autobiography. The straightforward unemphatic clarity establishes right away a tone, reasonable and unexcited, that will remain consistent no matter what follows. There is no lyrical evocation, conjuring up; atmosphere in the form of poetic word-painting is absent. Anything that looks like heartfelt emotional shading can be read just as easily as good-natured parody or harmless role-playing. Perhaps it’s all a joke. (But that’s what uncomprehending listeners say to the composer Cecil Taylor in a story, included in this new collection, that makes him its hero: “You weren’t playing some kind of joke, were you?”)

Aira deals out one such sentence after another in the manner of someone absorbed in an unimaginably complex game of solitaire. The game would collapse, would not exist at all, without the mechanics of syntax, shored up by the stylistic commitment to sentences that remain under all circumstances cleanly carpentered and staunchly logical. Logical, that is, within the terms of their premises. The reader quickly learns that Aira’s sentences can be categorized as describing (1) things that have happened to the reader as well, and probably to almost everyone; (2) things that may have happened to Aira but not to the reader or anyone the reader knows; or (3) things that could not possibly have happened to anyone anywhere.

After a while we lose faith in our ability to tell which category a given sentence belongs to. The text becomes an apparently lucid and meticulous map of lurking instability. The most humdrum observation becomes suspect: “A well-stocked napkin dispenser sits



César Aira, Santiago, Chile, 2011

on every café table in Buenos Aires.” This might well be true; the author is certainly well equipped to make such a judgment; but with Aira there is always the sense that what seems most plausible may be an utter fabrication. He is never more poker-faced and matter-of-fact than when stating what is not only impossible but ridiculously impossible: “It all began when the genie came out of the Magic Milk bottle and asked me what I would prefer: to have a Picasso or to be Picasso.” A malevolent shopping cart moves about without being pushed. The drops of paint constituting the Mona Lisa liberate themselves from the canvas and embark on a series of separate adventures in an infinitely wide range of eras and locations. God celebrates His birthday with a tea party to which only apes are invited. A young man encounters two men with

inconceivable deformities: “The feet of ‘the one with the feet’ and the hands of ‘the one with the hands’ were as big as the rest of their bodies, or even slightly bigger.” These premises are never more than opening moves. Once established, it is up to the writer to figure out how to extricate himself from their implications; and if we continue to read him, we have no choice but to make Aira’s problem our own.

Aira has imposed his presence not by great literary monoliths but by a profusion of miniatures. The sheer urgency with which he has issued his work is remarkable. He has written plays and literary essays, but above all, beginning with the as-yet-untranslated *Moreira* (1975), small-scale fictions averaging a hundred pages or so, the precise num-

ber of which is difficult to enumerate because he is constantly adding to his body of work. The total, encompassing some very short stories published as separate volumes, hovers around seventy; twenty of these shorter works have now been collected in *The Musical Brain and Other Stories*, which joins ten other Aira novels already published in translation by New Directions in recent years.

All this quantification has more than a casual relation to Aira’s work, which is often haunted by matters of number and measurement, ratio and velocity. Questions of multiplication and division, of entities that systematically proliferate or expand or subdivide, are often central to his stories—to the extent, that is, that his stories can be said to have centers. In “*Athena Magazine*,” two aspiring litterateurs advance from the idea of publishing a “double issue” to ever greater multiples with the paradoxical effect of approaching the infinitesimal: “Making an issue composed of ten thousand numbers meant that the ‘single’ issue would be 0.0036 of a page.”

The narrator of “The All That Plows through the Nothing” (one of the most brilliantly confounding of the stories in *The Musical Brain*) attempts over several pages to compute how many taxis there are in Buenos Aires, how many are ridden by passengers carrying a briefcase containing \$100,000 in cash, and how many of those passengers are likely on a given day to leave their briefcase in the taxi. “In the Café” catalogs the increasingly baroque complexity of toys made from a single folded napkin to amuse a child, culminating in an intricately detailed representation of Catherine the Great’s 1786 tour of the Russian provinces.

Aira appears to be particularly fascinated by almost infinitely expandable interior spaces (like the initially humble priest’s house in “Acts of Charity” that gradually allows space for billiard rooms, recording studios, darkrooms, and multiple workshops) that are akin to fairy-tale spaces of beanstalks or the forbidden subterranean destination where the twelve princesses go to dance their shoes to pieces every night.

A more basic arithmetic function—addition—establishes the method of his narratives. One sentence is linked to its predecessor, one day’s page and a half to the next, allowing, according to the author’s interviews, no subtraction of the previous day’s work.¹ Thus, if the maniacal policeman in *Shantytown*

¹See Michael Greenberg, “The Novelist Who Can’t Be Stopped,” *The New York Review*, January 13, 2011, for a more detailed account of Aira’s working procedures.

(2001) has to keep fleeing forward, it is in obedience to Aira's own frequently propounded principle of *la huida hacia adelante*—the need to continually invent ways to extend the story without being crushed by the premises he has perhaps arbitrarily put in place. A child who plays with blocks cannot move the foundational blocks once they are positioned without toppling the whole structure. With Aira one is always conscious of each sentence being laid down with wary precision precisely like a child's block. The reader marvels at the way the work in progress is thus further transformed while worrying that the addition of each new element means an incrementally greater risk of collapse.

The fundamental tension of his books springs less from the often mad-deningly convoluted predicaments of his characters than from the self-evident predicament of the author. Once the process has been set in motion, he must one way or another keep the thing going, and the unease is all the more present when he seems to be idling, playing for time like a hostage trying to keep his captors distracted.

As his stories are unfolding we can never tell whether a densely detailed episode is pivotal or digressive, just as we can never tell whether any of the complications of the plot are actually tending toward anything recognizable as a resolution. The reader is thus enlisted as a surrogate for the writer, sharing his uncertainties and difficulties, as if the reader were himself a writer perusing his own manuscript and looking for a way forward into the next paragraph. In "Cecil Taylor," the last story in *The Musical Brain*, the jazz composer is led to contemplate the idea that

the career of the innovative musician was difficult because, as opposed to the conventional musician, who had only to please an audience, the innovator had to create a new one from scratch.

Aira's fiction offers a protracted course on how to become the reader his work is written for.

"When one reads one makes one's own novel," he has stated. His own books he sees as "a continuation of the system of reading," reading that in his own case—beginning with the nineteenth-century jungle tales of the Italian writer Emilio Salgari and the comic book adventures of *Little Lulu* before moving on to Raymond Roussel, André Breton, and other hermetic explorers—has ranged omnivorously over eras and genres.² The residue of all that reading feeds a deliberately dissonant mash-up of wildly different narrative expectations. A passage of exquisitely attenuated philosophical reflection is apt to morph without warning into apocalyptic violence or an eruption of surreal slapstick. Chunks of subtlest aphorism bob up amid cartoonlike sequences of dementedly ricocheting, seemingly pointless action. The effect is sometimes of encountering a made-for-TV 1970s disaster picture scripted by Borges, or conversely Henry James's *The Sacred Fount* rewritten as a vehicle for Bugs Bunny.

²See Aira's interview with María Moreno, *Bomb*, Winter 2009.

He has been likened to a remarkably wide range of writers—Sebald, Kafka, Bolaño, Calvino, Nabokov, Murakami. Duchamp and De Chirico have likewise been invoked, and Aira himself has mentioned Roussel and Borges with reverence. He doesn't in fact resemble any of them other than superficially, and by the same token echoes hundreds more, perhaps all the authors he has ever read, including the many he translated in a long career as a translator of every sort of book, technical, pulpy, or high literary. The commercial assignments find an echo in the randomness that haunts his stories. One might imagine a translator rebelling, at last, against being compelled to read each book word by word, with reverential slowness and attention, no matter what the nature of the text.

As for comparisons, why not bring in Georges Perec (although Perec was more a constructor of puzzles and Aira is more a teller of jokes extended preposterously beyond their anticipated punchline), or Lewis Carroll (remembering Aira's penchant for exploring the terrifying discontinuities of childhood), or, why not, Sterne with his insistence on digressions that lead ever further from the original premise, as in those dreams where the dreamer, trying to get back to a location where he may have had a crucial rendezvous, finds himself tangled in misdirecting byways?

Or, for that matter, why not any of the North Americans—ranging from Philip K. Dick and Stephen King (whose *Pet Cemetery* Aira translated) to Thomas Pynchon and George Saunders—who share his propensity for stirring into their stories every scrap of detritus up to and including, literally, the kitchen sink?

He seems to have internalized every form of elaborately improbable storytelling: dreams, soap operas, serials about space travel, the ongoing story lines of homemade comic books, the sexual fantasies of socially isolated students, the theological systems of recently concocted religions, the conspiracy theories of solitary political fanatics, the patent applications of mad inventors. The stories abound in technological marvels, unprecedented methods of healing, new and staggeringly unlikely cosmological theories: an apparatus of pseudoscientific experimentation evoking in turn a Rube Goldberg drawing, a Scrooge McDuck comic book, or a 1950s movie about extraterrestrial invaders.

His works do not lend themselves to plot summary. They are themselves plot summaries, or more precisely summaries (as compressed as possible) of successive incidents in search of the plot that might ease the bewilderment of his hapless characters, who are apt to find themselves, as in a cartoon, walking unconsciously on air: except that Aira's characters (or entities, as his cast may include a gust of air or a subatomic particle) do not fall to smithereens but as often as not find a way to keep going by sole grace of verbal improvisation. The sentences are the rope bridge by which, along with writer and reader, they manage to clamber toward some further and extremely tentative haven.

In *Conversations* (2007), everything hinges on the vain attempt of two friends to agree on the plot of an adventure movie each of them saw on television,



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Angela N. H. Creager
Director, 2016–2020

an attempt that spins out into every variety of inattention, incomprehension, forgetfulness, and unconscious invention, until the irretrievability of an absurd storyline threatens to undermine the possibility of any stable reality. Yet for all that undermining, there is a certain dreamlike inconsequentiality to any action: somewhat like Bill Murray in *Groundhog Day*, Aira's characters die without dying.

No matter what they are describing—the pursuit of a city-dweller by the dog whom he obscurely mistreated, the sodomizing of a pope by an animate drop of paint—the stories retain a mood of deep equanimity, a steady rhythm bordering on monotony. There is no cause for alarm, no reason to fly into a panic. Even if (in the title story “The Musical Brain”) a fugitive circus dwarf is giving birth to a giant dragon-fly before your eyes, the event is narrated as if it were as commonplace as the blank days of childhood:

Nothing ever happened in the street: a car went by every half hour. We had vast amounts of free time: we went to school in the mornings, and the afternoons lasted entire lifetimes.

This is from a story in which two children invent a game involving the evocation of ever higher numbers, culminating in their discovery of “infinity” as the number that trumps all others: “The game was very simple and austere, and that’s why it was inexhaustible.”

His sense of the commonplace marks Aira as a profoundly local writer, many of whose nuances undoubtedly go astray in translation. Even the most fantastic events are more often than not rooted in existing places—various neighborhoods of Buenos Aires, his native town Coronel Pringles, the pampas—a gymnasium, a supermarket, a café, a city bus, a truckstop hotel, an ice cream stand—whose reality is not undermined but rather curiously reinforced by the absurd events that unfold in their vicinity. Worked into the seams of his stories is an inventory of a world: shopping carts, dumpsters, exercise bikes, and, yes, napkin dispensers.

The titular phantoms of his novel *Ghosts* (the finest and most insidiously affecting of his work thus far translated) become visible because they haunt a busy construction site whose dust adheres to them. Aira rescues an exotic wonderland, where happiness lies in the pleasure of nothing ever happening, from the heart of tedium and deprivation. It is something like the hidden side of a life spent sitting every day in a café as Aira claims to do while he writes his stories, watching time pass, registering tiny intrusions and minor kerfuffles the better to drop them into the mix.

That uneventful place out of which he writes is often the world of childhood, to which he returns again and again like a base that must be tagged at each round of a children’s game. He goes back to early moviegoing (“we played at cinema, ‘acting out’ whole movies, reinventing them, using them as material for the creation of games”), secret spy rituals, until he approaches the place where language is born:

Small children lack linguistic or cultural frames to put around their perceptions. Reality enters

them torrentially, without passing through the schematizing filters of words and concepts.... The immediate absorption of reality, which mystics and poets strive for in vain, is what children do every day.

In the light of such passages Aira’s stories begin to resemble the monologues (populous monologues crammed with boisterous intrusive voices) of a solitary child precociously eavesdropping on the adult world and turning it into material for fantasies intended for the sole delectation of the child himself.

Reading Aira there is often the temptation to ask why you should care about

quality of the words that describe those actions:

At bottom, it was a question of language. There weren’t any things in reality, only words, words that cut the world into pieces, which people end up taking for things.

The words are locked in a struggle with the limits of words, as if in dread that somewhere down the road might be a place where language would become terminally cataleptic, locked into a gesture that could never be altered: a paralyzed sculpture that would constitute the literature of the dead. “Only the unrepeatable is truly alive,” declares the narrator of “The All That Plows through



“The Necklace,” Buenos Aires, 1999; photograph by Alessandra Sanguinetti

a story so transparently concocted from one moment to the next. Or perhaps the question should be whether you do care, and if not why do you keep reading? Surely not merely to ponder the author’s curious interest in taxidermy, or dwarves, or any of the other suggestive elements that pop up in a way whose very unpredictability comes to seem predictable. Aira’s characteristic zigzag—the intrusion of an altogether different and unforeshadowed theme in the midst of an already complicated story—is designed to subvert even further the already tenuous links of causality. As complications spread out, the story becomes a meditation on the place where the disparate threads will somehow come together: a place that cannot exist, like that point of rendezvous the dreamer is continually obstructed from getting back to. In place of resolution, in the midst of a story always visibly collapsing, there are antigravitational moments when objects and people and whole situations fly impossibly (and often literally) beyond logic, beyond sequence, as if in protest against necessity.

These stories in their barest form would look like arbitrary strings of beads. Their frenetic actions involve movement and mutation on the most hyperbolic scale, but we are continually made aware of the isolated, frozen

the Nothing” just as he attempts to describe the unique experience that will permit him to “become literature” or, as it turns out, die in the act of trying.

As César Aira interrogates the purpose of what he is doing in the story he is writing—or, as the imaginary version of César Aira pretends to be interrogating the absurd purpose of the story that he pretends to be writing—the story seems to become an allegory of the act of writing whose limits and underwiring it exposes at every turn. The framework is laid bare as in a building without walls, like the luxury condos under construction in *Ghosts*. Does writing exist to provide a medium for transmitting stories or do stories exist to give writing something to be about beyond its own internal dynamics and geography? As Aira narrates he comments on what he is narrating, until plot developments become background and commentary the foreground. Without the commentary, in fact, the story might seem the most rapid of diagrams, a log of someone else’s dream transcriptions or a compendium of frames from a comic strip full of incomprehensible local allusions.

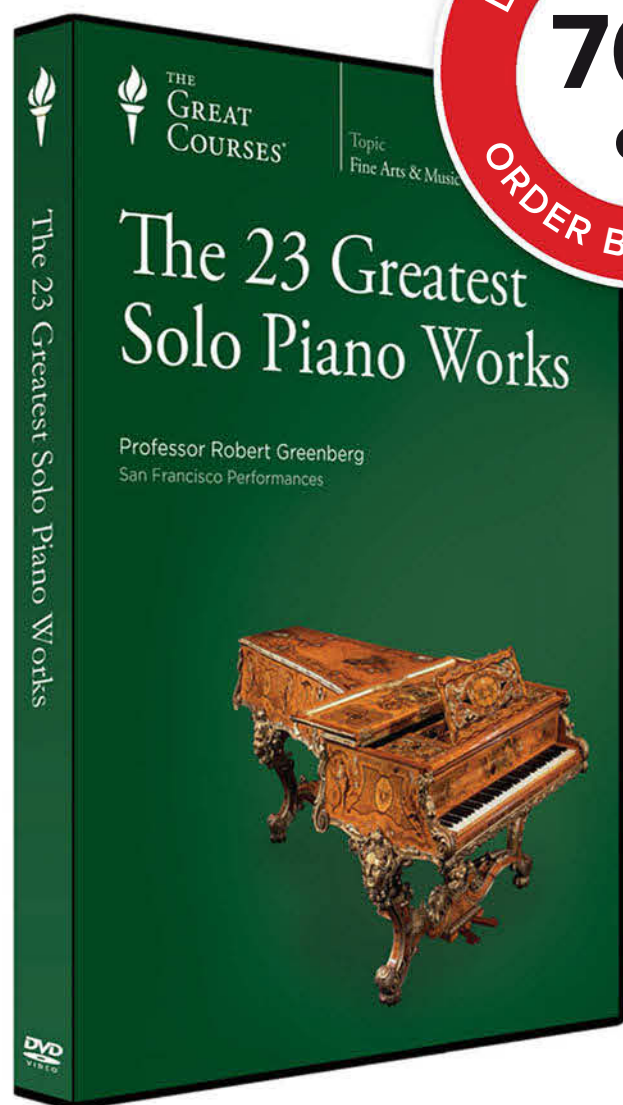
What keeps us reading is not to know what will happen next but to know what he will think next—something that he

too wants to know, as if the whole business of being a writer in Aira’s systematic, process-bound fashion amounted to a prolonged experiment conducted for the curiosity of finding what will come out of it, the author knowing as little as any possible reader what that upshot might be. Aira’s embedded interpretive flights have the odd effect of dislodging the reader from the story, almost forcing him to become lost in his own commentary, his own memories and childhood games, the banal locations of his own neighborhood. Pursuing such parallel lines of interpretation and comparison, the reader becomes an adjunct character in the book, a creature inhabiting the marginalia, neither in the story nor yet free from it.

Finally one sticks around because of the tantalizing possibility that Aira may yet get to the bottom of something that seems to have no bottom. He is the master of a method whose application and ultimate purpose remain in perpetual doubt. He might be a rationalist demonstrating the irrationality of what is; a naturalist of the impossible; a maker of allegories, or of parodistic pastiches of allegories, of parables whose precise lessons deliberately elude clarification. He is just as likely demonstrating that such forms as allegory and parable are no more than imperfect attempts to capture a reality more elusive—“real reality, so distinct from the pale fantasies of reason” (*The Miracle Cures of Dr. Aira*, 2002). Aira seeks to improve on such earlier, approximate methods by means of his mad-scientist investigation into the neurology of story-making.

The act of storytelling is nowadays conventionally prized for its universal, ageless, benevolent associations. It is our shared heritage of magic; it is a defining human trait. With Aira we are just as aware of the essential cruelty of storytelling—or rather its cosmic indifference, an indifference only partly disguised in the oldest myths and legends and fairy tales. Finally there is nothing to cling to. Emotions are free-floating, personhood itself is free-floating—a state of affairs only thinly masked by the reassuring “thereness” of the voice-over commentary. The stories here do have a life of their own, and it is a life offering much surprise, much humor, much brilliance of observation and invention, but little in the way of even momentary consolation. They summon up a genie who can do everything but fulfill our wishes.

The reader feels at moments as if he has washed up in some successor state of literature, in which outward forms, characteristic tropes and techniques, are carefully maintained, but where former purposes have given way to some new and not yet decipherable intent. Yet in such a situation the old forms are perhaps more potent than ever: they regain the mystery of the incomprehensible that stories are always promising, in vain, to explicate. One of the stories in *The Musical Brain* begins: “Circumstances had reduced me to begging in the street”: a perfect narrative set-up for *The Arabian Nights*, that most wonderful, as well as supremely cruel, work. Aira’s reconceiving of such a compendium of all possible stories might be called an *Arabian Nights* of the corner drugstore; but then it is fair to say that *The Arabian Nights* itself was an *Arabian Nights* of the corner drugstore. □



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The Pope and the Planet

Bill McKibben

Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home

an encyclical letter by Pope Francis.
Vatican Press, 184 pp.,
available at w2.vatican.va

On a sprawling, multicultural, fractious planet, no person can be heard by everyone. But Pope Francis comes closer than anyone else. He heads the world's largest religious denomination and so has 1.2 billion people in his flock, but even (maybe especially) outside the precincts of Catholicism his talent for the telling gesture has earned him the respect and affection of huge numbers of people. From his seat in Rome he addresses the developed world, much of which descended from the Christendom he represents; but from his Argentine roots he speaks to the developing world, and with firsthand knowledge of the poverty that is the fate of most on our planet.

So no one could have considered more usefully the first truly planetary question we've ever faced: the rapid heating of the earth from the consumption of fossil fuels. Scientists have done a remarkable job of getting the climate message out, reaching a workable consensus on the problem in relatively short order. But national political leaders, beholden to the fossil fuel industry, have been timid at best—Barack Obama, for instance, barely mentioned the question during the 2012 election campaign. Since Francis first announced plans for an encyclical on climate change, many have eagerly awaited his words.

And on those narrow grounds, *Laudato Si'* does not disappoint. It does indeed accomplish all the things that the extensive news coverage highlighted: insist that climate change is the fault of man; call for rapid conversion of our economies from coal, oil, and gas to renewable energy; and remind us that the first victims of the environmental crisis are the poor. (It also does Americans the service of putting climate-denier politicians—a fairly rare species in the rest of the world—in a difficult place. Jeb Bush, for example, was reduced to saying that in the case of climate the pope should butt out, leaving the issue to politicians. "I think religion ought to be about making us better as people," he said, in words that may come back to haunt him.)

The pope's contribution to the climate debate builds on the words of his predecessors—in the first few pages he quotes from John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI—but clearly for those prelates ecological questions were secondary. He also cites the pathbreaking work of Bartholomew, the Orthodox leader sometimes called the "green patriarch"; others, from the Dalai Lama to Anglican archbishop Desmond Tutu, have spoken eloquently on this issue as well. Still, Francis's words fall as a rock in this pond, not a pebble; they help greatly to consolidate the current momentum toward some kind of agreement at the global climate conference in Paris in December. He has, in effect, said that all people of good conscience need to do as he has done and give the

question the priority it requires. The power of celebrity is the power to set the agenda, and his timing has been impeccable. On those grounds alone, *Laudato Si'* stands as one of the most influential documents of recent times.

It is, therefore, remarkable to actually read the whole document and realize that it is far more important even than that. In fact, it is entirely different from what the media reports might lead one to believe. Instead of a narrow and

intervened in nature, but for a long time this meant being in tune with and respecting the possibilities offered by the things themselves. It was a matter of receiving what nature itself allowed, as if from its own hand.

In our world, however, "human beings and material objects no longer extend a friendly hand to one another; the relationship has become confrontational." With the great power that technology has afforded us, it's become



Pope Francis visiting typhoon survivors in Tacloban, the Philippines, January 2015

Johannes Eisele/AFP/Getty Images

focused contribution to the climate debate, it turns out to be nothing less than a sweeping, radical, and highly persuasive critique of how we inhabit this planet—an ecological critique, yes, but also a moral, social, economic, and spiritual commentary. In scope and tone it reminded me instantly of E.F. Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful* (1973), and of the essays of the great American writer Wendell Berry.¹ As with those writers, it's no use trying to categorize the text as liberal or conservative; there's some of each, but it goes far deeper than our political labels allow. It's both caustic and tender, and it should unsettle every nonpoor reader who opens its pages.

The ecological problems we face are not, in their origin, technological, says Francis. Instead, "a certain way of understanding human life and activity has gone awry, to the serious detriment of the world around us." He is no Luddite ("who can deny the beauty of an aircraft or a skyscraper?") but he insists that we have succumbed to a "technocratic paradigm," which leads us to believe that "every increase in power means 'an increase of 'progress' itself'...as if reality, goodness and truth automatically flow from technological and economic power as such." This paradigm "exalts the concept of a subject who, using logical and rational procedures, progressively approaches and gains control over an external object." Men and women, he writes, have from the start

easy to accept the idea of infinite or unlimited growth, which proves so attractive to economists, financiers and experts in technology. It is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth's goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit.

The deterioration of the environment, he says, is just one sign of this "reductionism which affects every aspect of human and social life." And though "the idea of promoting a different cultural paradigm...is nowadays inconceivable," the pope is determined to try exactly that, going beyond "urgent and partial responses to the immediate problems of pollution" to imagine a world where technology has been liberated to serve the poor, the rest of creation, and indeed the rest of us who pay our own price even amid our temporary prosperity. The present ecological crisis is "one small sign of the ethical, cultural and spiritual crisis of modernity," he says, dangerous to the dignity of us all.

Thus girded, the pope intervenes in a variety of contemporary debates. Automation versus work, for instance. As he notes, "the orientation of the economy has favoured a kind of technological process in which the costs of production are reduced by laying off workers and replacing them with machines," which is a sadness since "work is a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth." The example he cites demonstrates the subtlety of his argument. Genetic modification of crops is a way, in a

sense, to automate or rationalize farming. There's no "conclusive proof" that GMOs may be harmful to our bodies; there's extensive proof, however, that "following the introduction of these crops, productive land is concentrated in the hands of a few owners" who can afford the new technologies.

Given that half the world still works as peasant farmers, this accelerates the exodus off the farm and into hovels at the margins of overcrowded cities; there is a need instead to "promote an economy which favours productive diversity," including "small-scale food production systems...be it in small agricultural parcels, in orchards and gardens, hunting and wild harvesting or local fishing." (And lest anyone think this is a romantic prescription for starvation, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization has in the last few years published one study after another showing that small farms in fact produce more calories per acre. Not per dollar invested—if you want to grow rich, you need a spread. But if you want to feed the world, clever peasant farming will be effective.)

It's not just small versus large. The pope insists on giving priority to diverse culture over the "levelling effect on cultures" encouraged by a "consumerist vision," which diminishes the "immense variety which is the heritage of all humanity." In words that are somewhat remarkable coming from the head of an institution that first set out to universalize the world,

the disappearance of a culture can be just as serious, or even more serious, than the disappearance of a species of plant or animal. The imposition of a dominant lifestyle... can be just as harmful as the altering of ecosystems.

Even more striking, in this regard, is his steadfast defense of "indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed," because for them land "is a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values." Compare that attitude with, say, the oil companies now destroying aboriginal land in order to mine Canada's tar sands.

But the pope is just as radical, given current reality, when he insists on beauty over ugliness. When he demands the protection from development of "those common areas, visual landmarks and urban landscapes which increase our sense of belonging, of rootedness, of 'feeling at home' within a city which includes us and brings us together," he is not just celebrating Frederick Law Olmstead—he's wading into, for instance, the still-simmering Turkish revolt that began with plans to tear down Istanbul's Gezi Park and replace it with a mall and luxury apartments.

He also insists on giving "priority to public transportation" over private

¹See my "Prophet in Kentucky," *The New York Review*, June 14, 1990.

cars. This was the precise phrase used by Jaime Lerner, the visionary mayor of Curitiba, Brazil, when a generation ago he launched the world's best transit system. His vision of Bus Rapid Transit is now spreading around the world, and it works best precisely where it most inconveniences autos, by insisting on dedicated bus lanes and the like. It makes getting around as easy for the poor as for the rich; every BRT lane is a concrete demonstration of what the Latin American liberation theologians, scorned and hounded by previous popes, once called "the preferential option for the poor."

The pope is at his most rigorous when he insists that we must prefer the common good to individual advancement, for of course the world we currently inhabit really began with Ronald Reagan's and Margaret Thatcher's insistence on the opposite. (It was Thatcher who said, memorably, that "there's no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families," and that's that.) In particular, the pope insists that "intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us."

Think of the limitations that really believing that would place on our current activities. And think too what it would mean if we kept not only "the poor of the future in mind, but also today's poor, whose life on this earth is brief and who cannot keep on waiting." We literally would have to stop doing much of what we're currently doing; with poor people living on the margins firmly in mind, and weighing the interests of dozens of future generations, would someone like to write a brief favoring, say, this summer's expansion by Shell (with permission from President Obama) of oil drilling into the newly melted waters of the Arctic? Again the only applicable word is "radical."

But as I say, we've seen this kind of neither-liberal-nor-conservative radicalism before—from critics like Schumacher or Berry or, in the formulation of *New York Times* columnist David Brooks, other "purveyors of '1970s-style doom-mongering about technological civilization.'" Indeed any serious effort to alter or even critique the largest trends in our civilization is now scorned, often by the theoretical left as well as the right. Brooks is united with, for instance, *n+1* editor Mark Greif, who in his recent *The Age of the Crisis of Man* (2015) heaps contempt on those who would do precisely what the pope undertakes:

Anytime your inquiries lead you to say, "At this moment we must ask and decide *who we fundamentally are*..." just stop. You have begun asking the wrong analytic questions for your moment.... Answer, rather, the practical matters... and

find the immediate actions necessary to achieve an aim.

For some, this would mean don't talk about individualism versus the common good; talk about some new scheme for carbon credits. In Brooks and Greif we hear the "real world" talking.

By contrast, at least since the Buddha, a line of spiritual leaders has offered a reasonably coherent and remarkably similar critique of who we are and how we live. The greatest of those critics was perhaps Jesus, but the line continues through Francis's great namesake, and through Thoreau, and Gandhi, and many others. Mostly, of



Photograph by Pierre Radisic

course, we've paid them devoted lip service and gone on living largely as before.

We've come close to change—opinion surveys at the end of the 1970s, for instance, showed that 30 percent of Americans were "pro-growth," 31 percent "anti-growth," and 39 percent "highly uncertain," and President Carter held a White House reception for Schumacher. But Reagan's election resolved that tension in the usual way, and the progress we've made, before and since, has been technological, not moral; people have been pulled from poverty by expansion, not by solidarity. The question is whether the present moment is actually any different, or whether the pope's words will fall as seeds on rocky ground.

If there's a difference this time, it's that we seem to have actually reached the edge of the precipice. Schumacher and the visionaries of the 1970s imagined that the limits to growth were a little further off, and offered us strong warnings, which we didn't heed.

Take water, which the pope addresses at length. We probably should not need his words to know that "access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival." We all know it should not be wasted, and yet we continue to waste it because doing so is beneficial to the rich and powerful: for instance,

insurance companies have planted enormous almond groves across California in recent years even as water supplies have started to shrink, and agribusiness planters have drawn down the aquifers of the Midwest.

In the same week that the pope's encyclical emerged, a huge new study showed that those aquifers are now overdrawn in regions that provide food for two billion people—the data come from satellites measuring the earth's gravitational field, which means that the water losses are so large they're affecting the planet on that scale. In the American West alone, the drought has become so serious that last year those satellites showed the evaporation of 63 trillion gallons of groundwater, weighing nearly 240 billion tons, a loss of enough weight that the Sierra Nevada mountains became measurably higher. New data also show that California's drillers must now go so deep to find groundwater that the supplies they tap have been in the ground for 20,000 years.

Or take biodiversity, where the pope rightly notes that "caring for ecosystems demands far-sightedness, since no one looking for quick and easy profit is truly interested in their preservation." But that alarm sounds somewhat louder when, in the same week as the encyclical, a new study in a prestigious journal found that extinctions were now happening at 114 times the normal background rate, and that the planet's "sixth mass extinction is already underway." In view of such empirical data, we can understand the pope's rare flicker of real anger when he refers to those "who turned the wonderworld of the seas

into underwater cemeteries bereft of colour and life."

His profound sadness about the inequality among people, and the toll it exacts on the poor, is also undergirded by remarkable new data that separate it from earlier critiques. The data show right now that inequality is reaching almost absurd heights: for instance, the six heirs to the Walmart fortune have more assets than the bottom 42 percent of all Americans combined; the two Koch brothers (together the richest men on the planet) have plans to spend more than the Republicans or the Democrats on the next federal election. If you want to understand why the Occupy movement or the early surge toward Bernie Sanders caught the usual political analysts by surprise, consider those facts. (The pope suggests that "many professionals, opinion makers, communications media and centres and power, being located in affluent urban areas, are far removed from the poor with little direct contact with their problems.")

Above all, the empirical data about climate change make it clear that the moment is ripe for this encyclical. A long line of gurus, of whom Francis is the latest, is now converging with a large number of contemporary scientists; instead of scriptures, the physi-

cists and chemists consult the latest printouts from their computer models, but the two ways of knowing seem to be making the same point. So far we've melted most of the sea ice in the summer Arctic, made the oceans 30 percent more acidic, and started the apparently irreversible slide of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet into the surrounding ocean. We are, to put it another way, systematically destroying the largest physical features on the planet, and we are doing it at a rapid pace.

Given that, who's the realist? The pope, with his insistence that we need a rapid cultural transformation, or David Brooks, speaking for the complacent, with his insistence that "over the long haul both people and nature are better off with technological progress"? The point is, there no longer is any long haul. Those who speak, in the pope's words, the language of "nonchalant resignation or blind confidence in technical solutions" no longer have a tenable case. What he calls the "magical conception of the market" has not, ultimately, done what Reagan promised; instead it has raised, for the first time, the very real specter of wholesale planetary destruction, of change that will be measured in geological time.

It's quite possible—probable, even—that the pope will lose this fight. He's united science and spirit, but that league still must do battle with money. The week the encyclical was released, Congress approved, in bipartisan fashion, fast-track trade legislation, a huge victory for the forces of homogenization, technocracy, finance, and what the encyclical calls "rapidification."

It's not that markets shouldn't play a part in environmental solutions: everyone who's studied the problem believes that the fossil fuel industry should pay a price for the damage carbon does in the atmosphere, and that that price, if set high enough, would speed up the transition to renewable energy. But the climate movement has largely united behind plans that would take that money from the Exxons of the world and return it to all citizens, which would have the effect of giving poor and middle-class people, who generally use less fossil fuel, a substantial net gain. The new fast-track agreements, by contrast, apparently explicitly forbid new climate agreements as a part of trade negotiations.

Anyway, if the outcome of the real-world battle is uncertain, the pope carries the intellectual contest. Brooks, for instance, makes the centerpiece of his attack on the encyclical the notion that the promising technocratic approach is, fortunately, expanding fracking, because burning natural gas produces less carbon than burning coal. This is scientifically obtuse (as I explained in these pages, an emerging body of evidence shows that fracking instead liberates vast quantities of methane, an even more potent greenhouse gas²), but in any event the extent of the damage we've already done to the climate means we no longer have room for slightly less damaging fossil fuels. We have to make the leap to renewable power.

And the good news is that that's entirely possible. Thanks to the engineers whose creativity the pope celebrates, we've watched the price of solar panels fall 75 percent in the last six years

²See "Why Not Frack?," *The New York Review*, March 8, 2012.

alone. They're now cheap enough that a vast effort, rooted in pragmatic physics, could ensure before the decade was out that there would hardly be a hut or hovel that lacked access to energy, something that the fossil fuel status quo has failed to achieve in two hundred years. Such a change would be carried out by small-scale entrepre-

neurs of just the sort the pope has in mind when he describes the dignity of work. And it would mean a very different world. Instead of centralized power in the hands of a few oil and gas barons like the Koch brothers, the earth would draw its energy from a widely diffused and much more democratic grid. Building that system in time

would require aid to the poorest nations to jumpstart the transition. It would require, for instance, a world much like the one the pope envisions, where concern for the poor counts as much as, in Brooks's sad words, the "low motivations of people as they actually are."

Brooks, Reagan, and Thatcher summon the worst in us and assume that

will eventually solve our problems—to repeat Brooks's sad phrase, we should rely on the "low motivations of people as they actually are." Pope Francis, in a moment of great crisis, speaks instead to who we *could* be individually and more importantly as a species. As the data suggest, this may be the only option we have left. □

Charming, Ruthless Andrew Cuomo

Jim Dwyer

The Contender:

Andrew Cuomo, A Biography

by Michael Shnayerson.
Twelve, 529 pp., \$30.00

All Things Possible:

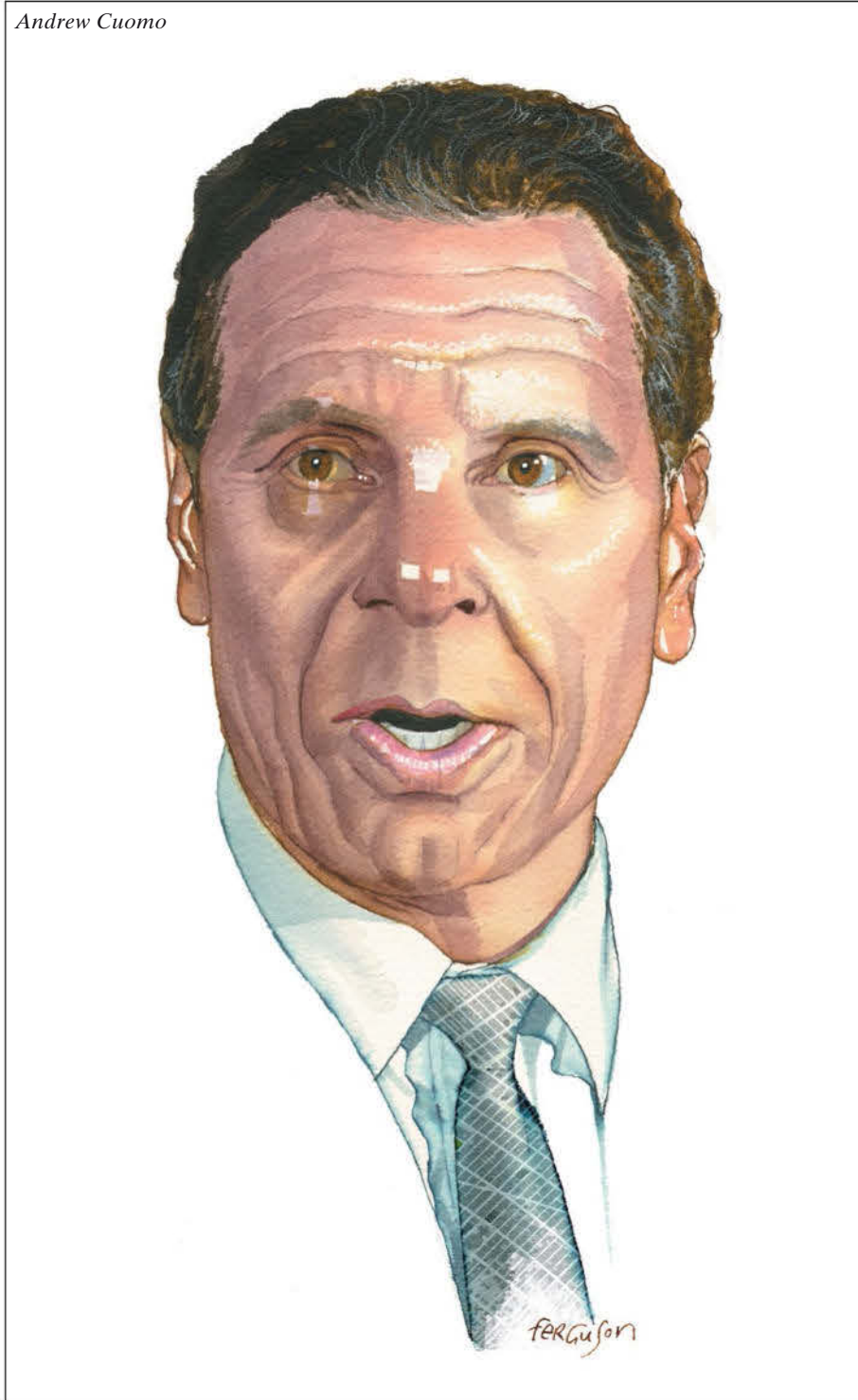
Setbacks and Success in Politics and Life

by Andrew M. Cuomo.
Harper, 517 pp., \$29.99

At his inauguration in January 2011, Andrew M. Cuomo declared that he was taking office as the new governor of New York with an attitude of "constructive impatience with the status quo of Albany." Six months later, Cuomo engineered passage of a law that recognized same-sex marriage. It was an utterly unexpected bloom in the political tundra. No state had moved on same-sex marriage in the previous two years. California's Supreme Court decision in 2008 recognizing it was frozen by referendum and litigation. The New York State Assembly had approved same-sex marriage legislation three times in 2007 and 2009, but the State Senate had rejected it in 2009, and the arithmetical road to passage in 2011 seemed just as daunting. Cuomo invited anxious legislators to his office and one by one coaxed and cajoled them to support it.¹

In the next two years, six other states followed, an expression of popular will that emboldened the US Supreme Court in 2013 to strike down a federal statute that excluded married same-sex couples from important benefits.² (In 2015, as part of a landmark ruling, the Court said Tennessee had to recognize the same-sex marriage of an army sergeant, one of the first under the New York law.) Cuomo's success astounded Albany, where people in the

Andrew Cuomo



statehouse had long known his reputation for political strong-arming but had not expected such persuasive passion on a matter of mere principle.

The Contender: Andrew Cuomo, A Biography, by Michael Shnayerson, was conceived and titled in hope that a man scarcely known outside New York State—a "prince in waiting," his life "the iconic story of the twenty-first-century American politician," as Shnayerson writes—might emerge as a strong candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2016. That prospect seems to dim each day that Hillary Clinton wakes with a strong

pulse and ruddy polls. Still, *The Contender* was a reasonable bet, although, at 529 pages, a hefty one.

Cuomo himself made the same wager with a five-hundred-page memoir, *All Things Possible: Setbacks and Success in Politics and Life*, published a few months before Shnayerson's account. So tightly woven are Cuomo's candor, charm, disingenuousness, idealism, ruthlessness, and drive that each and all those qualities seem to have propelled his successes and failures.

"The brilliance of Cuomo is this," Joe Ventrone, a Republican aide on Capitol Hill when Cuomo was the secretary

of housing and urban development in the second Clinton administration, told Shnayerson. "He is probably the most effective secretary that HUD ever had. And the most hated."

Shnayerson records similar verdicts from people—most unnamed—who encountered Cuomo at many stations of his public life, which is now four decades long. He entered politics as a teenager in the campaigns of his father, Mario M. Cuomo, who served as governor of New York for twelve years; on weekends, he drove a tow truck for AAA, trying to get cars running with roadside improvisation. (He now fixes cars as a hobby.³) A practical, expedient streak has served him well as an auto mechanic and, up to a point, as a political operative. When he was just twenty-eight, working as a private citizen, he helped create a new kind of housing for homeless people that included social services support because he—and others—saw that true shelter was more than four walls and running water. Later, he had a successful turn as New York's attorney general.

In getting his way, he has time and again amplified the power of standard legal tactics such as audits, subpoenas, and investigative commissions with bluster, shrewd instincts for the vulnerabilities of others, and public relations gimmickry. He sweet-talks and he bludgeons.

At age fifty-seven, early in his second term as governor, he has a portfolio of accomplishment rare in public life: marriage equality in New York; reform of HUD; the creation of 200,000 housing units nationally for poor and homeless families that include a "continuum of care"; the exposure of student loan gouging schemes at major colleges; forcing the surrender of huge bonuses paid to executives at financial firms that had been bailed out by the public in 2008; the dismantling of a pay-to-play scheme at the New York State Pension Fund, in which investment banks funneled cash to well-connected middlemen for a share of the fund's business. He ended a number of the built-in "inflatons" in the New York budget that had automatically driven state spending from \$79 billion to nearly \$137 billion in less than a decade.

His failures have been as consequential or as glaring as his achievements. He broke a promise to end

³Michael Barbaro, "Indulging an Obsessions with Motors and Muscle," *The New York Times*, October 28, 2010.

¹Cuomo, while leading the charge, had the benefit of a new coalition of supporters of the cause, including wealthy Republicans and Ken Mehlman, who had managed George W. Bush's reelection in 2004 and served two years as chairman of the Republican National Committee. As Jo Becker writes in *Forcing the Spring: Inside the Fight for Marriage Equality* (Penguin, 2014), Mehlman lobbied Republican state senators.

²Writing for the majority in *United States v. Windsor*, Justice Anthony M. Kennedy said the New York law was a "far-reaching legal acknowledgment of the intimate relationship between two people, a relationship deemed by the State worthy of dignity in the community equal with all other marriages."

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SPEEDBOAT

Renata Adler • Afterword by Guy Trebay

Unconventional, disarmingly witty, and mordantly observant, Renata Adler's first novel remains a touchstone of 1970s New York fiction. Acclaimed by writers as diverse as David Foster Wallace, Elizabeth Hardwick, and David Shields, *Speedboat* is unfailingly "elegant, funny, vivid, brilliant, luminous, exquisite!"

—*The New York Times Book Review*

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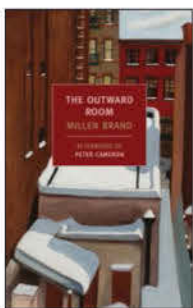


AFTER CLAUDE

Iris Owens • Introduction by Emily Prager

At once a bitter breakup saga and an exercise in humor as therapy, *After Claude* expertly chronicles the musings of young Harriet, unrepentant wisecracker and revenge-seeker, after her boyfriend has her evicted from his West Village apartment. "A very funny book by an exhilarating talent." —*The New York Times*

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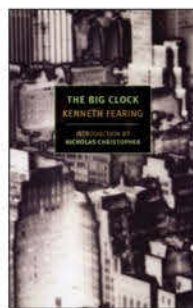


THE OUTWARD ROOM

Millen Brand • Afterword by Peter Cameron

A bestseller when it was first published in 1937 and praised by Theodore Dreiser and Sinclair Lewis, *The Outward Room* is a gritty, realistic and poignant account of a young woman's odyssey from the throes of madness to self-discovery and recovery in New York.

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THE BIG CLOCK

Kenneth Fearing • Introduction by Nicholas Christopher

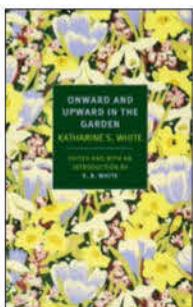
Murder, infidelity, and high intrigue define this masterpiece of American noir fiction, a novel about a hard-drinking, tough-talking New York writer in search of his mistress's murderer. "That rare noir masterwork that somehow both keeps you in suspense and unmoors you with its underlying fatalism." —NPR

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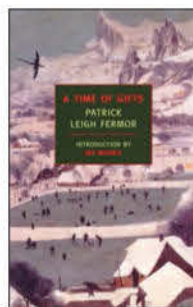


ONWARD AND UPWARD IN THE GARDEN

Katharine S. White • Introduction by E. B. White

Katharine White's lucid essays on the history and literature of gardens, flower arranging, herbalists, and developments in gardening are indispensable. "*Onward and Upward in the Garden* is quite a bit more than a book about flowers. It is itself a bouquet, the final blooming of an extraordinary sensibility." —*The New York Times*

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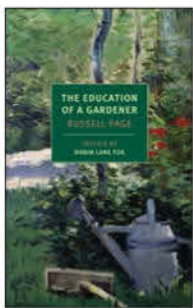


A TIME OF GIFTS

Introduction by Jan Morris

Hailed as Leigh Fermor's crowning achievement and revered for its sublime evocation of a pre-war Europe that would never exist again, this book recounts the author's travels as an 18-year-old young man on foot from Holland to Constantinople on the eve of World War II. "Recovers the innocence and the excitement of youth, when everything was possible and the world seemed luminous with promise." —*Literary Review*

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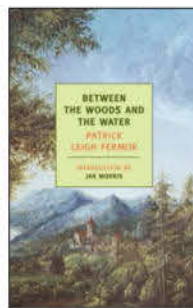
THE EDUCATION OF A GARDENER

Russell Page • Preface by Robin Lane Fox

Page's memoir is not only essential reading for today's gardeners, but a master's compelling reflection on the deep sources and informing principles of his art. "First published in 1962, this is a mixture of anecdote, advice and opinion that is still relevant today."

—One of the Ten Best Gardening Books, *The Independent* (UK)

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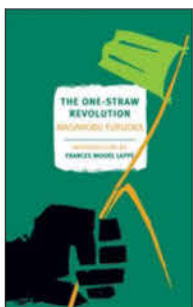


BETWEEN THE WOODS AND THE WATER

Introduction by Jan Morris

The second installment in Leigh Fermor's captivating odyssey across a "lost Mitteleuropa of wild horses and dark forests, of ancient synagogues and vivacious Jewish coffeehouses, of Hussars and Uhlans, and of high-spirited and deeply eccentric patricians with vast libraries. . ." —Benjamin Schwarz, *The Atlantic*

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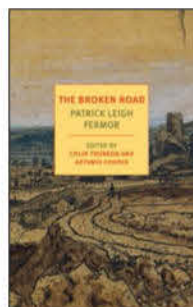
THE ONE-STRAW REVOLUTION: AN INTRODUCTION TO NATURAL FARMING

Masanobu Fukuoka • Introduction by Frances Moore Lappé
Preface by Wendell Berry • Translated by Larry Korn

A prescient, visionary classic of ecology and sustainable development. "*The One-Straw Revolution* is one of the founding documents of the alternative food movement, and indispensable to anyone hoping to understand the future of food and agriculture."

—Michael Pollan

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THE BROKEN ROAD

Edited by Colin Thubron & Artemis Cooper

The Broken Road is the account of the final leg of Leigh Fermor's journey, catching up with Paddy in the fall of 1934, following him through Bulgaria and Romania and ending in Greece. "A fitting epilogue to 20th-century travel-writing and essential reading for devotees of Sir Patrick's other works." —*The Economist*

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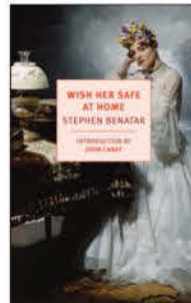
THE LONELY PASSION OF JUDITH HEARNE

Brian Moore • Afterword by Mary Gordon

Moore's tragicomic novel follows Judith Hearne—aging spinster and genteel one-time member of Belfast high society—as she struggles to cope with the passage of time. Called a “masterpiece” by Richard Yates and “everything a novel should be” by Harper Lee, “Judith Hearne's descent is both excruciating and enthralling.”

—Anne Enright, *O, The Oprah Magazine*

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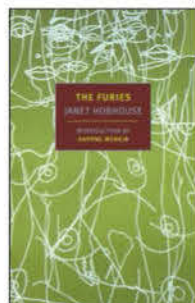


WISH HER SAFE AT HOME

Stephen Benatar • Introduction by John Carey

Stephen Benatar's *Wish Her Safe at Home* is poignantly odd, a story that is by turns chilling and moving. “The inheritance of a mansion in Bristol sparks Stephen Benatar's rediscovered classic *Wish Her Safe at Home*, in which a cheerfully unbalanced young striver finds her energetic efforts to embrace the finer things in life (and seduce the vicar) thwarted.” —*Vogue*

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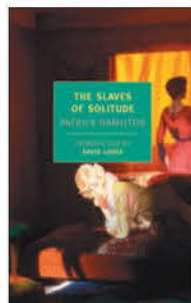


THE FURIES

Janet Hobhouse • Introduction by Daphne Merkin

An exhilarating, fiercely honest, ultimately devastating book, *The Furies* confronts the claims of family and the lure of desire, the difficulties of independence, and the approach of death. “[A] sad, beautiful—and profoundly affecting—meditation on love and death and family.” —Michiko Kakutani, *New York Times*

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THE SLAVES OF SOLITUDE

Patrick Hamilton • Introduction by David Lodge

Set in an English boarding house during World War II, Patrick Hamilton's sprightly, humorous novel recounts the looming neighborly troubles of middle-aged lonely-heart Miss Roach, which threaten—or promise—to wrench her from the stupefying boredom of her everyday life. “The author never loses sight of the ultimate pathos of the human condition.” —*Newsday*

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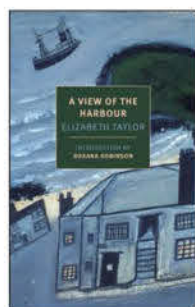
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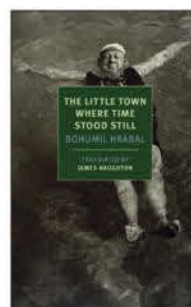


A VIEW OF THE HARBOUR

Elizabeth Taylor • Introduction by Roxana Robinson

With its large cast of flawed but likeable characters, its colorful and exquisite prose, and its expert portrayal of the small crises of everyday life, Elizabeth Taylor's novel of gossip and romantic betrayal in a small English shore town is “funny, savage and full of loneliness and suppressed emotion.” —Rachel Cooke, *The Guardian*

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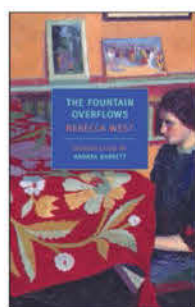
THE LITTLE TOWN WHERE TIME STOOD STILL

Bohumil Hrabal • Introduction by Joshua Cohen

Translated by James Naughton

Described by Milan Kundera as “Czechoslovakia's greatest writer,” Bohumil Hrabal brings to life a rural town in these two interlinked narratives about the scandalizing escapades of the Madame Bovary-like Maryška as she searches for lust, love, and life.

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THE FOUNTAIN OVERFLOWS

Rebecca West • Introduction by Andrea Barrett

“A real Dickensian Christmas pudding of a book—full of incident, full of family delights, full of parties and partings, strange bits of London, the lobby of the House of Commons, a classic murder with portraits of the murderer, the murderess and a couple of innocent bystanders, bill collectors, kitchen fires, good food, and a considerable quota of ghosts. West's is a world that is a delight to enter and to live in, warm and vital, and constantly entertaining.”

—Elizabeth Janeway, *The New York Times Book Review*

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JOURNEY BY MOONLIGHT

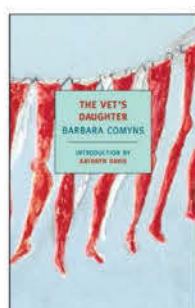
Antal Szerb • Introduction by Julie Orringer

Translated by Len Rix

Deftly combining elements of black comedy, melodrama, romance, the psychological thriller, and the adventure novel, *Journey by Moonlight*, which tells the story of a man's sexual and spiritual journey through Italy, is “a devastatingly intelligent novel of love, society and metaphysics in a mid-1930s Europe.”

—Toby Lichtig, *TLS*

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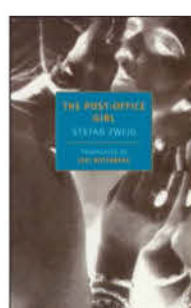


THE VET'S DAUGHTER

Barbara Comyns • Introduction by Kathryn Davis

This visionary novel is a forgotten classic of magical realism, chronicling the story of a brutal vet, his dying wife, their shy daughter, Alice, and the appalling triumph that results when Alice retreats into her own self-fashioned dream world and discovers that she possesses extraordinary occult abilities.

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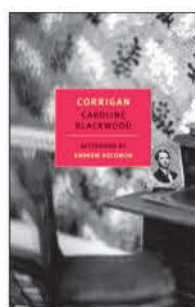


THE POST-OFFICE GIRL

Stefan Zweig • Translated by Joel Rotenberg

A haunting noir novel by a modern European master, and a source of inspiration for Wes Anderson's *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, *The Post-Office Girl* chronicles the dizzying journey of the provincial Christine as she travels to the resort of her rich American aunt in the Swiss Alps. There, she meets the war-wounded Ferdinand, resulting in a “fascinating depiction of the effects of history on individual lives.” —*The Financial Times*

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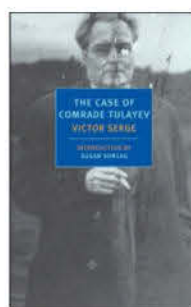


CORRIGAN

Caroline Blackwood • Afterword by Andrew Solomon

After her husband dies, Mrs. Blunt looks forward to nothing in life except visiting his grave—until she meets an archly manipulative Irishman named Corrigan, whose mysterious motives make for the captivating story at the heart of this novel. “Caroline Blackwood combines a childlike neatness and exactitude of expression with an adult susceptibility to the charm of the unexpected and devious: an effective mix.” —*TLS*

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THE CASE OF COMRADE TULAYEV

Victor Serge • Introduction by Susan Sontag

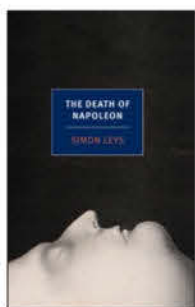
Translated by Willard R. Trask

When Comrade Tulayev, an important bureaucrat, is shot dead on the frozen streets of Moscow, a continent-wide search begins for the murderer. Victor Serge's wildly inventive novel of risk, adventure, and wartime nobility “pulses with lyrical flights that take us up into the stars.” —*Bookforum*

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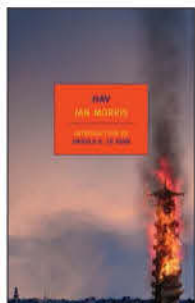


THE DEATH OF NAPOLEON

Simon Leys • Translated by Patricia Clancy & the author

Napoleon, newly escaped from St. Helena, disguises himself as a cabin hand while awaiting his reascension to power. He revisits Waterloo (now a tourist destination), Paris, and other locales in this poignant, imaginative, and lively alternative biography. "*The Death of Napoleon* is utterly satisfying sentence by sentence and scene by scene." —*TLS*

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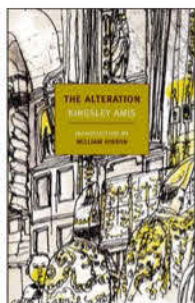


HAV

Jan Morris • Introduction by Ursula K. Le Guin

Visit the mythical island of Hav in this stunning hybrid work of speculative fiction and travel memoir. When Morris published *Last Letters from Hav* in 1985, it was short-listed for the Booker Prize. Here it is joined by *Hav of the Myrmidons*, a sequel that brings the story up-to-date. Morris's only novel transports the reader to an extraordinary place that never was, but could well be.

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THE ALTERATION

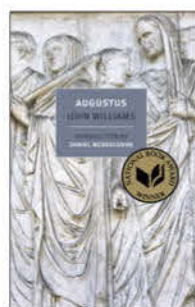
Kingsley Amis • Introduction by William Gibson

It is 1976, but the modern world is a medieval relic, frozen in intellectual and spiritual time since Martin Luther became pope in the 16th century. This farcical novel, about a choirboy who tries to evade the ecclesiastics who want to surgically preserve his faultless voice, is strikingly original, subversive, and deeply entertaining.

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John Williams Collection

Experimenting radically in content and genre, John Williams's novels are united by their clear prose and aching melancholy. **Buy all 3 books at 40% off \$45.85 = \$27.51**

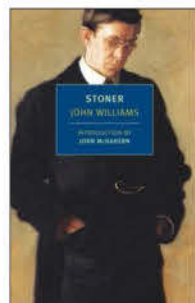


AUGUSTUS

Introduction by Daniel Mendelsohn

In this National Book Award-winning novel, "readers of both *Stoner* and *Butcher's Crossing* will here encounter an altogether new version of the John Williams they've come to know: *Augustus* is an epistolary novel set in classical Rome. It's a rare genius who can reinvent himself in his final work and earn high praise for doing so." —*The Millions*

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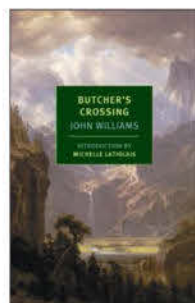
STONER

Introduction by John McGahern

Ian McEwan called *Stoner* "a marvelous discovery for everyone who loves literature."

Now an international bestseller, "it is a perfect novel, so well told and beautifully written, so deeply moving, that it takes your breath away." —Morris Dickstein, *The New York Times Book Review*

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BUTCHER'S CROSSING

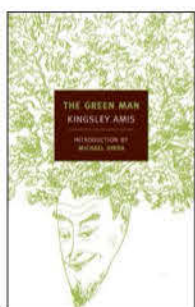
Introduction by Michelle Latiolais

In this tale of a Harvard dropout who seeks adventure hunting one of the last great buffalo herds, but ends up losing his innocence, John Williams "... dismantles the myth of the west, revealing a horror story about the grinding day to day of just surviving. . . even in its softer moments it doesn't overdo anything, and the moral criticism is in the precision of the language, the now-famous simple and elegant Williams prose." —Bret Easton Ellis, *The Guardian*

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These three chilling spectral novels—which vary in tone from light and humorous to decadent and solemn—revel in the uncanny and the supernatural. **Buy all 3 books at 40% off \$44.90 = \$26.94**

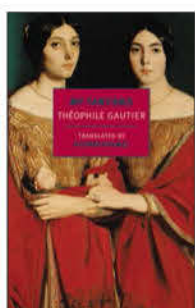


THE GREEN MAN

Kingsley Amis • Introduction by Michael Dirda

Follow middle-aged Maurice Allington as he contends with family, death and drink in this splendid black comedy. "What makes *The Green Man* readable and re-readable is the skill with which Amis, like Henry James before him, turns the narrative screw. It is, quite simply, a rattling good ghost story." —*The Times* (UK)

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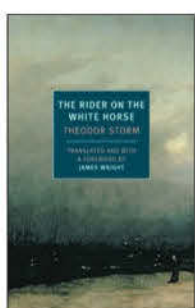


MY FANTOMS

Théophile Gautier • Translated by Richard Holmes

My Fantoms assembles seven stories spanning the whole of Gautier's career into a unified work that captures the essence of his adventurous life and subtle art. These are highly inventive fin-de-siècle tales of erotic awakenings, devilish encounters, and doomed young poets.

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THE RIDER ON THE WHITE HORSE

Theodor Storm • Translated and with a foreword by James Wright

A masterwork of German literature, this novel, set on the misty coast of the North Sea, chronicles a traveler's ghostly encounter with a horse-riding apparition and his quest to discover the rider's identity. The book collects seven other shorter works, including the lyrical love story "Immensee."

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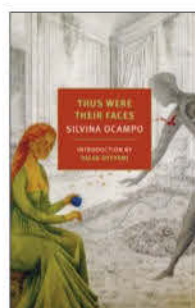
THE WOMAN WHO BORROWED MEMORIES

Tove Jansson • Introduction by Lauren Groff

Translated by Thomas Teal & Silvester Mazzarella

Island solitude, the dangerous pull of artistic impulse, marooned children, railway-obsessed loners, mental transference, and other fancies are the subjects of these unsentimental yet humane stories by a singular figure in world literature.

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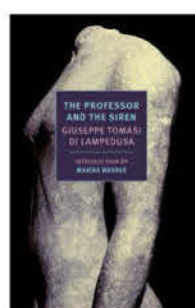
THUS WERE THEIR FACES

Silvina Ocampo • Introduction by Helen Oyeyemi

Preface by Jorge Luis Borges • Translated by Daniel Balderston

Here are tales of doubles and impostors, angels and demons, a marble statue of a winged horse that speaks, a beautiful seer who writes the autobiography of her own death, a lapdog who records the dreams of an old woman, a suicidal romance, and much else that is incredible, mad, sublime, and delicious.

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THE PROFESSOR AND THE SIREN

Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa

Introduction by Marina Warner • Translated by Stephen Twilley

"The Professor and the Siren," like *The Leopard*, meditates on the past and the passage of time, and also on the relationship between erotic love and learning. Lampedusa's final masterpiece is accompanied here by the parable "Joy and the Law" and "The Blind Kittens," a story originally conceived as the first chapter of a followup to *The Leopard*.

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the discriminatory gerrymandering of New York's legislative districts. He brazenly shut out other important public officials, among them the mayor of New York or the state attorney general, from decisions such as closing the city's subway system ahead of a predicted storm or disposing of millions in legal settlements. (Recently, the mayor publicly said that Cuomo had thwarted the city's legislative goals in education and public housing through "game-playing," and claimed the governor was acting vindictively in other ways over perceived slights.) Cuomo denounced a loophole in state campaign money laws, then made heavy use of it to amass a \$47 million treasury, much of it from real estate concerns that needed his favor.

Until last year none of his policy reversals or petty stunts had cost him much politically. He calculated that the broader public would not really care much about a particular issue, and that anyone who did would have to accept change at the pace he deemed prudent. Some of his seemingly nonnegotiable goals—reforms in ethics requirements, campaign financing, redistricting, and criminal justice—turned out to be the currency of compromise, coins he surrendered if the price was right. Last year, though, one such gamble turned sour.

To close a deal on the state budget with legislative leaders, Cuomo agreed in March 2014 to shut down an anticorruption commission he had created only nine months earlier. When the commission still existed, Cuomo declared, "Anything they want to look at, they can look at: me, the lieutenant governor, the attorney general, the comptroller, any senator, any assemblyman." He could not possibly have meant that and, as a team of *New York Times* reporters showed in a withering account last July, his administration took care during the commission's brief life that it not cause much grief for himself or his allies. (For example, his aides blocked a subpoena to a company that had bought airtime for Cuomo's own campaign).⁴

Two men, however, were furious about the commission's probing: the majority leader of the State Senate, Dean Skelos, a Republican, and Sheldon Silver, the speaker of the Assembly, a Democrat. They were, with Cuomo, the three points of power in Albany. All legislation had to be agreed to by them and the governor—the "three men in a room" who run the state.

Cuomo's commission subpoenaed records of outside income paid to state legislators in excess of \$20,000, a matter of little practical concern to most senators and assembly members, but of the utmost importance to the two leaders in the room with Cuomo. They had been paid millions of dollars by private law firms, and under New York's flaccid disclosure laws, never had to explain what services they performed for the money.

These subpoenas, Skelos and Silver argued, violated the separation of powers, and on behalf of the legislature, they hired law firms to resist them. They could have saved themselves the trouble. Cuomo needed their coopera-

tion more than he wanted to know what their pay records revealed. Changes in New York's governance—rent regulation, tax breaks for developers, criminal justice issues, education policy—are agreed on in a package deal by the three men. Everything is negotiated. What emerges is known as the Big Ugly, the product of an expensive annual carnival of dysfunction.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, from 1985 through 2004, not a single state budget was passed on time, and then only occasionally until Cuomo took office in 2011.⁵ He immediately declared that late budgets would be "a thing of the past." After three passed on time in his first three years, he called it a hat trick and handed out celebratory hockey pucks.



Mario and Andrew Cuomo at a fund-raiser for Mario Cuomo's gubernatorial campaign, New York City, June 1982

In 2014, in order to close the deal with Skelos and Silver on the fourth budget, Cuomo offered to shut down the corruption commission, which was then halfway into its eighteen-month term. It would mean, of course, that the commission would no longer be poking into the outside incomes of Skelos and Silver. That made those two men happy. Cuomo, for his part, pointed to some new minor ethics reforms and pronounced his defunct commission a "phenomenal success." He handed out souvenir baseballs to mark the fourth on-time budget—a grand slam. Within a year of the commission's closing, both Silver and Skelos had been indicted on corruption charges; federal authorities claimed that large parts of private income paid to them or family members were simply bribes, dolled up as fees.

Whatever the public understood of the details, Albany was now looking the same under Cuomo as it had for years. His poll ratings sank. Rex Smith, editor of the *Albany Times Union*, wrote that "the political peril confronting Andrew Cuomo is rooted in the very behavior that enabled him to achieve success."⁶

It was not that Cuomo did not care about the pervasive corruption in Albany. But it seems that he could not bear to part with the one coin he val-

ued beyond all else, the on-time state budget, an affirmation that he could pull off what his predecessors had rarely, if ever, managed. That included his father, Mario Cuomo, who was in office from 1983 through 1994.

Mario Cuomo, the son of Italian immigrants, was raised in Queens and was a top-of-his-class law school graduate who joined a practice in Brooklyn after he could not find work in the white-shoe firms of 1950s Manhattan. That snub marked him. A relentless worker who often left the house before his children were awake and returned home after they were asleep, Mario Cuomo rose to public notice as a crusader in the mid-1960s when he took up the

cause of sixty-nine homeowners from Corona, an Italian section of Queens. The city planned to bulldoze their homes for a new school. The homeowners paid Cuomo's fees by unclogging household drains or with baskets of homemade food.

There was no playbook for what needed to be done to save their homes, no statutory scheme, but Cuomo—with backing from the columnist Jimmy Breslin—put together a solution that preserved the neighborhood. That levelheadedness brought him an assignment from Mayor John V. Lindsay to mediate between the city and activists in Forest Hills, a middle-class neighborhood where planners intended to build three twenty-four-story towers of low-income housing.

From these episodes, Andrew, his eldest son, drew at least two lessons. First, he writes, government officials too often were indifferent to complexity:

I saw then how dangerous it can be for politicians, Democrats or Republicans, to wage political arguments from on high, with little knowledge of the ultimate consequences of their actions. . . .

He also realized that he would have to find ways of getting his father's attention. During the Forest Hills debate, protesters appeared outside the family home one morning. Mario Cuomo, it turned out, was not there. "To make their point, the demonstrators would have had to march at 7 PM on a Sunday, the one time of the week that my mother insisted he be home for din-

ner," Cuomo writes. "I learned early that if I wanted to spend time with my father I had to tag along."

He served as the director of his father's long-shot campaign for governor in 1982, the most practical and tireless of loyalists. Shnayerson cannot help admiring a piece of Andrew's tactical mischief during that campaign. To get on the ballot, Mario Cuomo needed 25 percent of the delegates at a state Democratic convention. Most were already committed to Mayor Ed Koch. As Andrew wrangled for backers, he did not want the county bosses to know about a small group of delegates who were already secretly in the Cuomo camp. So he hid them, chartering an evening cruise for them on Onondaga Lake. Meanwhile, back on shore, Andrew met the bosses, who agreed to throw a few delegates to Mario Cuomo. He wound up tallying 39 percent. Though still far behind Koch, he had, thanks to Andrew's sleight of hand, gotten on the ballot and won the runner-up's coveted prize: he exceeded expectations.

After starting nearly forty points down in the polls, Mario Cuomo beat Koch in the primary, and then a successful Republican businessman, Lewis Lehrman, in the general election. The Cuomo campaign had been outspent three to one.

In conversation or in a speech, Mario Cuomo might drop a mention of Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit philosopher and paleontologist; many Jesuits, much less the Albany press corps, would be hard-pressed to explain de Chardin in any detail. On his office wall, Cuomo displayed a Holbein portrait of Thomas More, then popularly regarded as the public man of conscience portrayed in *A Man for All Seasons*.

His son, meanwhile, was sent out to beat sense or submission into state agencies. One magazine article described Andrew as "Mario's id."⁷ Andrew writes, "The Albany media dubbed me 'Prince of Darkness,' 'Darth Vader,' and Mario's 'hatchet man.'" Shnayerson quotes the young Cuomo: "I like to think I think the big thoughts. But I also operationalize."

As transition director for his father, twenty-four-year-old Andrew, just out of law school, had to tell prominent Democrats in state government that they would not keep their jobs:

People assumed that I was making the personnel decisions. They were wrong, but I became the lightning rod for dozens of people out of work. There was nothing good in it for anyone. The newly unemployed didn't lash out at my father. They blamed the messenger.

Cuomo partially attributes his failure in the Democratic gubernatorial primary of 2002, his own first run for elected office, to resentment that lingered from two decades earlier. Maybe. But his wins and losses owe much to his innate aggressiveness. When Cuomo was at HUD, Shnayerson writes, he would lash out brutally at aides for what he regarded as insufficient preparation. Shnayerson has many such stories, and though almost none is attributed to a named person, no one

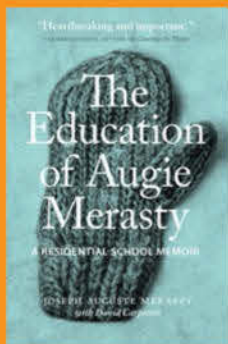
⁷Steve Fishman, "The Cuomo Family Business," *New York*, August 1, 2010.

⁴Susanne Craig, William K. Rashbaum, and Thomas Kaplan, "Cuomo's Office Hobbled Ethics Inquiry by Moreland Commission," *The New York Times*, July 23, 2014.

⁵From 1983 through 1994, Mario Cuomo was governor. He was followed by George E. Pataki, 1995–2006; Eliot Spitzer, 2007–2008; and David Patterson, 2008–2010.

⁶"A Lesson of Watergate, 40 Years On," *Times Union*, August 6, 2014.

HE WAS ONLY FIVE WHEN THEY TOOK HIM.



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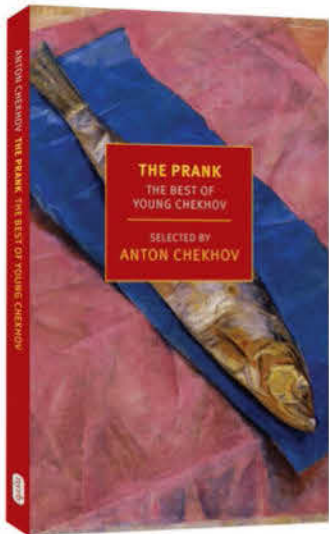
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seriously disputes Cuomo's astringency. Some count his impatience as a virtue. Shnayerson writes of the Cuomo ethos at HUD:

"Process does not count as progress," he would exclaim. "Don't tell me you had a meeting, don't tell me you called them, don't tell me you're going to get together and you sent out a memo. That's process. Where's the progress? Where are the results?" He had a point. In fairness, he almost always had a point. But that point could be really sharp. "When you can't respond," recalled one staffer, "that's the cruelest thing."

Not only is Cuomo a demanding, difficult boss, but also, Shnayerson hints, without showing much evidence, a master saboteur of rivals. He raises the possibility that Cuomo toppled or pushed from power Eliot Spitzer, a predecessor in the governor's office, or contrived to damage Chris Christie, the governor of New Jersey and a potential rival for the presidency.

Of Spitzer, who resigned when his meetings with a prostitute in Washington were exposed during a money-laundering investigation, Shnayerson writes: "Some would wonder if Andrew had given the governor some final nudge: passed along a rumor of call girls to the authorities, perhaps." Christie fell from grace when his aides were found to have created four days of traffic jams at the George Washington Bridge as punishment for a New Jersey mayor who had not endorsed his reelection. Shnayerson conjures a scene of Christie pacing in the governor's mansion in New Jersey, wondering if Cuomo had leaked damning documents.

Shnayerson does not endorse explicitly either of these readings of events, but he indulges unnamed sources who, at times, speak far more speculatively than authoritatively. He quotes an anonymous federal civil servant describing how Cuomo scuttled a rival's appointment as HUD secretary, supposedly by seeking an investigation of a Seattle commercial development that might have reflected badly on the man. In fact, an inquiry into the development was started not by Cuomo but by housing and civic activists in Seattle who filed a formal complaint, as was reported at the time and confirmed to me last month.⁸

Cuomo and members of his administration protect his reputation with fierce arguments to journalists, though they are rarely willing to be quoted by name. No wonder Shnayerson leans heavily on unnamed sources. Alas, their musings needlessly distract from the history that he chronicles with verve and a steady hand: Cuomo's tactical use of the powers in his various offices.

When he was New York's attorney general, Shnayerson writes, Cuomo loudly criticized financial firms that had

taken federal bailout money in 2008 and were planning to pay huge bonuses to their executives. He claimed that as attorney general, he had standing to sue because the payments amounted to a "fraudulent conveyance." A thin argument, but his righteous outrage won the day: the bonuses were reduced to \$18.4 billion from \$32.9 billion in 2007.

Then Cuomo learned that American International Group (AIG) was giving away \$165 million not in bonuses but in "retention" payments to its executives. AIG had received the largest public bailout of a private company in United States history after it "guaranteed" \$58 billion in shaky subprime mortgages. Politicians on all sides railed against the retention payments. Cuomo demanded the names of the recipients, and under pressure, AIG complied. Cuomo did not make the list public. If the recipients voluntarily returned the payments, he said, he would not reveal who had gotten them:

Andrew told AIG that its top retention-payment earners had the weekend to decide whether to comply. On Monday, nine of AIG's top ten bonus recipients, along with fifteen others, agreed to give back their retention payments, \$50 million in all. As promised, Andrew slid the names in a drawer: he would no longer threaten to release them, or any others.

It was a muscular, bravura performance. With the same maneuvers of extralegal publicity, he wounded Spitzer, a rival who served as governor while Cuomo was attorney general. Following a report in the *Albany Times Union* that the State Senate majority leader, who was an enemy of Spitzer, had used state helicopters for what were primarily political fund-raising trips, Cuomo commenced an investigation. His office's report concluded that the senator had not violated very loosely drawn rules—but it faulted Spitzer and his aides for ordering the state police to recreate missing records in order to embarrass a foe. Thanks to Cuomo, the villain of the story was not a senator squandering state resources, but Spitzer's office for assembling information and leaking it to the press.

In the summer of 2014, the Cuomo reelection campaign tried to disqualify Zephyr Teachout, an insurgent candidate, from the gubernatorial primary ballot on the grounds that she was not resident in New York. Teachout was a full-time law professor at Fordham University in Manhattan, and Cuomo hung his case on her occasional occupancy of a family home in Vermont.⁹ She fought off the challenge, but burned up valuable time in court. Cuomo also refused to debate her. With poor grace, he ignored her at a Labor Day parade. It was asymmetrical warfare, and unbecoming.¹⁰

To punish the Working Families Party, a small progressive party that had considered giving Teachout a valuable ballot line, the Cuomo forces set up a Women's Equality Party and spent

⁸Peter Lewis, "Probe Stalls Rice's Possible Hud Nomination," *The Seattle Times*, December 13, 1996; John V. Fox and Carolee Coulter, "Pacific Place Garage Example of Projects Going Awry," *City Living Seattle*, May 3, 2011; John Fox interview, May 25, 2105.

⁹"Ruling in Challenge to Zephyr Teachout's Residency," *The New York Times*, August 11, 2014.

¹⁰Like Mario Cuomo, Teachout, too, exceeded expectations in the primary vote tally, getting 34.3 percent.

millions to qualify it for a rival position on the ballot. The initials of this new party, WEP, were just one letter different from those of the annoying Working Families.

New York is a decidedly blue state, but under a truce between the two parties, gerrymandered electoral maps allot twin fiefdoms: the Democrats get emphatic control of the Assembly and the Republicans, with an eroding demographic base, are able to cling to a Senate majority. Incumbents have an estimated 98 percent reelection rate. Cuomo promised that he would bring this shameless manipulation to an end. Instead, he traded it in during the 2012 budget negotiations in order to get changes to the state pension system. Two years later, as we have seen, he

swapped his corruption commission for, among other things, an on-time budget.

To win the prizes of reformed pensions and timely budgets, Cuomo made deals that also hardened the status quo. Shnayerson chronicles these compromises fairly; Cuomo, who knows the paradoxes of government better than anyone, does not address them at all.

The most affecting parts of Cuomo's memoir deal with his failed campaign for governor in 2002, and the public collapse, immediately after it, of his marriage to Kerry Kennedy. He had been set adrift by his own arrogance, he writes. That period in the early 2000s reminds him of a frightening trip, years

earlier, piloting his family's thirty-three-foot Chris-Craft from Martha's Vineyard to Virginia. Alone, he lost the horizon and his bearings in fog off Block Island. After nearly hitting jagged rocks, he reluctantly decided to trust the boat's instruments:

Giving up control is not something I've done often in my life.... I bobbed around for what felt like an eternity in the fog.... I felt now as I had then, lost without anything I usually depended on to keep me safe.

He recalls that going back to his old neighborhood in Queens, seeing his grandparents' home, and devoting himself to his children helped him

get through the funk of his personal failures.

Cuomo is not nearly as searching about his public life. Perhaps it is hoping too much that a book composed as a campaign prop would turn out to be consistently revealing and useful. Still, to the profit of himself and his readers, he might have reflected on the coinage of his public compromises, what he spends and what he gets and what things cost him. His promise of "constructive impatience" with the status quo has often become an unseemly acquiescence. One might argue that this is the ugly necessity of governing; that as bad as those moments have been, perhaps he has been as good as we can expect. To his credit, Cuomo would be the last to make that argument. □

France: The Return of Anti-Semitism

Robert Badinter

The following is a translation of a talk given by the former French minister of justice in Lyon last February.

I have come many times in the past to Lyon to commemorate the roundup of Jews on February 9, 1943, in the rue Sainte-Catherine, a place that is still so charged with painful memories. I've come alone and I've come with members of my family. I've watched the ceremonies. But I myself have never chosen to speak. The children of those deported, who saw their loved ones vanish into the night of the death camps, were, so to speak, amputees. Life heals the wound, scars form. But there are times when the unspeakable pain returns, when there is nothing but an empty void. I dreaded that sense of emptiness and chose instead to come among you all, in an act of filial piety and faithfulness to memory. Today, however, the time has come to break my silence.

Why did they die, those who fell into the trap set for them by Klaus Barbie on this spot? They were arrested on the third floor, in the offices of the Union générale des israélites de France (UGIF), the General Union of French Jewry, where efforts were underway to find hiding places for Jewish children. They were herded downstairs amid the clatter of SS jackboots. They were thrown into trucks that stood waiting at the end of the street and taken to Montluc prison. That was their first stop on the painful journey that took them from Lyon to Drancy, and then on to the death camp at Auschwitz, in Poland.

And so they died as martyrs because the hatred for Jews, the Nazis' demented anti-Semitism, condemned them to death. They died because they were Jews, and for that reason alone. Men and women, children and the elderly, their fates were sealed by the decisions of Hitler and his accomplices. The rest of it, the extermination of six million Jews on the European continent, was nothing more than a matter of implementing that decision by any means necessary, however atrocious. Peace returned, but the deportees did



Jewish deportees at the Drancy transit camp outside Paris, 1942

not. Everyday life resumed without them. There seemed good reason to believe that violent anti-Semitism had been drowned in the torrents of blood spilled in the Holocaust.

It was a fool's paradise, we know that now. The religious anti-Semitism that reigned in the time of the Inquisition and the nationalistic anti-Semitism that prevailed during the Dreyfus Affair were succeeded by the racial anti-Semitism of the twentieth century, the worst of them all. Then, in the twenty-first century, a new breed of anti-Semitism sprang up, masquerading under the name of anti-Zionism, and fomented by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, two thousand miles away from France. We believe in the principle of a just peace between the Israeli and the Palestinian peoples, guaranteed by secure and mutually acknowledged borders. But how do the challenges involved in achieving such a durable peace and the stubborn persistence of the conflict justify the atrocious crimes committed here in France, prompted by the fanatical ideology of Islamic extremists?

Exactly what is it that we've witnessed in the past several months in France? The age-old cry of hatred, "Death to the Jews!," has echoed through the streets of Paris for the first time since the German Occupation. Synagogues have been attacked, and Jews have been insulted and harassed in the public streets. Ilan Halimi was kidnapped and tortured to death by a gang of thugs hoping to extort a ransom from his family because, as the stubborn old stereotype tells us, all Jews are wealthy. A young couple were violently attacked in their home in Créteil, the apartment was vandalized, and, most shameful of all, the young woman was raped in order to force information from them as to the whereabouts of an imaginary fortune. In Toulouse, worse yet, Jewish children were murdered in a high school, a latter-day massacre of the innocents.

And just recently, we have experienced, in the aftermath of the massacre of *Charlie Hebdo* journalists and the murder of two policemen, the taking of Jewish hostages in a kosher supermarket. Four of the hostages were killed in cold blood once the killer had

ascertained to his satisfaction that they were Jews. In Nice, a French jihadist attacked and stabbed three soldiers who were guarding a Jewish cultural center. When questioned, the attacker had nothing to say but expressions of his hatred for France, French soldiers, and Jews.

And so, we survivors of the dark years of the Occupation have watched in horror as anti-Semitism has once again reared its bloody face. For when Mohammed Merah, in a Jewish high school in Toulouse, chased and caught a little girl aged eight as she tried to run away, grabbed her by the hair, and shot her point-blank in the head, he was reenacting the deeds of the SS *Einsatzgruppen* as they liquidated Jews in the ghettos of occupied Europe. When someone kills a child in that way, for being born a Jew, what can we call that if not the worst kind of anti-Semitic crime? In the commission of these crimes, these murderers also commit the gravest of travesties against the Muslim religion in whose name they dare to claim they act, a religion that according to Muslim theologians is a source of peace.

The truth is simple: these men are barbarians every bit as much as their Nazi forerunners who did their work here seventy-two years ago, driven by the same anti-Semitic hatred, murdering millions of Jews, including those whose names are inscribed on that plaque. For us, the sorrow and the pity are not selective. We do not mourn only our dead. We also salute the journalists of *Charlie Hebdo*, who died for freedom of the press. Our compassion goes out to their families, who have suffered so, and to the families of the policemen slain in the line of duty.

As for us, as Jewish citizens of France, tireless defenders of the values of the French Republic, in the name of all our martyrs, we shall fight to the finish, by all and any lawful means against racism and anti-Semitism, this leprosy of mankind, which remains, always and wherever it appears, a manifestation of barbarism. □

—Translated from the French by Antony Shugaar

Hot Dreams of Liberty

Bernard Bailyn

Revolutions Without Borders: The Call to Liberty in the Atlantic World

by Janet Polasky.

Yale University Press, 371 pp., \$35.00

Janet Polasky's *Revolutions Without Borders* does three things, and does them well. It identifies and traces the fortunes of the most zealous promoters of the "universal cry of liberty" in the tumultuous twenty-eight years after 1776. It demonstrates the importance of understanding the failures, the dead ends, the unrealized dreams, as well as the successes of past eras. And it contributes to our knowledge of Atlantic history.

That subject—the common, comparative, and interactive aspects of the lives of the people in the four continents that surround the Atlantic basin, which lies at the heart of Polasky's book—has had a remarkable recent history. Based on the concept that the Atlantic region can be viewed as a whole, as a historical unit in itself that transcends national and local boundaries, it took its present form in the early 1990s and has flourished in historical writing ever since, though it is little known outside academia.

The outpouring of publications within academia has been prodigious. Essays came first. Between 2002 and 2010 twenty-nine volumes of collected essays on Atlantic history appeared, in three languages. Between 1998 and 2013 thirty book-length monographs on various aspects of the subject were published in this country alone, six in the single year 2008. With this impetus the publishers got serious. From Oxford University Press in 2011 came a *Handbook of the Atlantic World, 1450–1850* (611 pages, thirty-seven essays); from Princeton University Press in 2015 a *Companion to Atlantic History* (500 pages, four substantial essays, 128 topical mini-essays); from Brill (in the Netherlands) an ongoing book series entitled *The Atlantic World: Europe, Africa, and the Americas*, which by April of this year included thirty-five volumes. Conferences on the subject have appeared everywhere: in Germany, France, England, Canada, and various places in the US. And the subject has settled into history curricula, in courses, seminars, and informal discussion groups.

The attraction of the subject, once glimpsed, was obvious, and grew as the literature on it deepened and matured. It was intriguing; it helped explain developments and circumstances otherwise obscured. "Events we explained in terms of local dynamics," one historian wrote, "are revealed to be above-water fragments of submarine unities." Further, it provided a large-scale context within which local histories could find more elevated, broader relevance. And for North Americanists it provided a natural association with the mainstream of European and Latin American history, extending their parochial scholarship into a wider world.

The concept of Atlantic history, which had had little traction before 1995, developed so swiftly that by 2010 some historians had become Atlantic world weary and the basic idea was in danger of becoming passé. And indeed the entire subject has never been



Thomas Paine advertising his services 'to any nation or people under heaven who are Desirous of Liberty & Equality'; cartoon by Isaac Cruikshank, 1792

free from criticism, even by some who themselves contributed to it.

One of the most common charges was that the subject was shapeless. What were its limits? The chronological boundaries were clear. The distinctive Atlantic world took form in the early sixteenth century with the European discoveries and conquest of the Americas, and lost its basic structure in the late eighteenth century with the destruction of European imperialism in the Americas, the beginning of the end of the Atlantic slave trade, and the economic transformation of the industrial revolution. But what were its spatial boundaries? How far did it extend? What did it include? To these questions Polasky's book provides some intriguing answers.

"The Atlantic world," she writes, "had never been as tightly interconnected as at the end of the eighteenth century" when "revolutions cascaded through all of the continents bordering the Atlantic."

From the Americas to Geneva, the Netherlands, Ireland, the Belgian provinces, France, Saint-Domingue, Guadeloupe, Poland, Martinique, Sierra Leone, Italy, Hungary, and Haiti, revolutionaries challenged the privileges of aristocrats, clerics, and monarchs to claim their sovereignty.

Polasky's aim, in this deeply researched book, is to search out and trace the fortunes of a distinctive group of radical reformers who traveled be-

yond the bounds of their native lands to promote the cause of universal human liberties. Itinerants, "cosmopolites," they saw the world and its possibilities for reform with fresh eyes, and dreamed of a new, better world to come. To do this she has organized the chapters not by the sequence of events but by the kinds of documents available, successively pamphlets, memoirs, narratives, newspapers, and official decrees. And within these chapters, each with its distinctive documentation, she explores the fortunes of the itinerant reformers.

The great and famous figures of the revolutionary era are there, but only in passing. Polasky is more interested in people who did not have "lasting fame" but whose lives reflect the breadth and passion of the "Atlantic Revolution broadly cast" and whose "ideals reverberated throughout the Atlantic basin"—people like the aristocratic Dutch pamphleteer Joan Derk van der Capellen, who led the Dutch Patriot Revolution of 1787 and declared that "the flame that burns in America will spread quickly, engulfing all of Europe, littered as the continent is with flammable material"; and the peripatetic French journalist, pamphleteer, and revolutionary activist Jacques-Pierre Brissot, who believed, despite his experiences in America, that citizens of the new nation treated one another as brothers and equals.

Among her other subjects are the novelist Betje Wolff and her partner

Aagje Deken, who fled the Netherlands after the collapse of the Patriot Revolution but who got into trouble in France for denouncing the use of violence. There is Georg Förster, a German naturalist and academic who toured the globe with Captain Cook, promoted Enlightenment ideas, and became an organizer of the short-lived, democratic Mainz Republic (1793) until forced out by Prussian troops, to die in exile in Paris; and the English poet Helen Maria Williams, an eyewitness to the bloody upheavals of the French Revolution who nevertheless wrote glowing reports of what she had seen.

Polasky also writes of Anna Maria Falconbridge, who chronicled the settlements in the new world of Sierra Leone; Jefferson's secretary, the diplomat William Short, who was torn between his enjoyment of Europe and his duties at home; Joel Barlow, a frustrated Connecticut poet who ended up in the toils of American diplomacy and business dealings in Europe; and the Genevan pastor Étienne Dumont, who witnessed the revolution in Paris and returned home to help create what the Genevan revolution of 1782 had only suggested, "an enduring revolution for equality and citizenship." (Polasky provides a six-page *Dramatis Personae* to help the reader identify the more obscure people she discusses.)

Similarly, Polasky concentrates not on the major upheavals in France and North America but on the "utopian dramas" in the peripheries: revolts in Brussels, Brabant, and other districts of Belgium; in Geneva and other cantons of Switzerland; in Guadeloupe and Amsterdam; in Ireland, Sierra Leone, and Scotland. Like the three revolts in Belgium between 1776 and 1789 fought for freedom by "shoeless, untrained Belgian militia," they all "fizzled out," swept aside by Austrian, French, Prussian, or Russian troops. But though these efforts proved to be "dead ends, unrealized dreams of liberty, and forays into a new world," they left behind testimonies of the daring of their leaders' vision; they "shook the Old Regime"; and they forecast revolutions to come that would "awaken slumbering people and send a chill up the backs of aristocrats and despots throughout Europe."

Thus Poland's constitution of 1791, endorsed by both Paine and Burke, was suppressed by Russian troops within a year, but the resistance movement, which had been led by Thaddeus Kościuszko, a hero of the American war, survived and led to a nationwide insurrection that ended in 1794 in a massacre of thousands and the partition of Poland by Russians, Austrians, and Prussians. Though defeated, the revolutionaries were celebrated as martyrs in the cause of liberty and Kościuszko was dubbed the Washington of Poland.

Organized as the chapters are, by modes of expression, there is no singular sequence of events in the book, no overall narrative, but in each case there are one or more micro-narratives and a wealth of information, largely in anecdotal form, that allow one to see how lesser rebellions for popular reform intersected, sometimes paradoxically,

with the great transformative movements of the time.

Polasky notes, for example, in the chapter on pamphlets that the tyrant the Belgian revolutionaries were rebelling against was the reformist emperor Joseph II, one of the most enlightened rulers of the era, who they declared “had tyrannized the Belgian People & reduced them to...Slavery.” Likening the Belgians’ efforts to preserve their traditional local privileges to the struggle of the Americans against Britain, the Belgians identified Joseph II with the notorious Philip II of Spain and their local efforts with the “larger Atlantic revolution.”

From the private journals one finds comments and experiences otherwise lost, like those of the Genevan Dumont, who in Paris in 1789 recorded his observations of the interior of the Bastille and the “astonishing events” that happened there. “In the space of a week,” he wrote, we “have lived a century.” Horrified by what he had seen in Paris, Dumont was caught in the dilemma of being too radical for Geneva and too moderate for France.

The chapter on narratives concentrates on the frustrations of the free blacks in revolutionary America, dispersed to Nova Scotia, the West Indies, London, and Sierra Leone in search of true freedom and citizenship. This is a sprawling, complex story told through the biography of the famous Olaudah Equiano, the former slave who opposed the slave trade in Great Britain; the accounts of John Clarkson, the first governor of Sierra Leone and his abolitionist brother Thomas Clarkson; the lives of the religious freedmen Boston King and David George; and involving pan-Atlantic webs of antislavery sentiment. It concludes in the Freetown Revolution in Sierra Leone, crushed, paradoxically, by an influx of Jamaican maroons (former slaves) in search of land to farm.

Newspapers (chapter 4), in an era when literacy of artisans and tradesmen increased radically (one third of Londoners, Polasky writes, read a weekly newspaper), exploded in numbers and circulation in these revolutionary years. They carried news not only of the major events but of the humblest, most obscure efforts at insurrection and amplified the political debates, plans, and programs, from Philadelphia to Warsaw. Their influence became especially important through the increase in the number of social clubs in both France and England, where newspapers were available and which became popular sites for political debates.

The chapter on fiction centers on the writings and feminist politics of Mary Wollstonecraft but involves also the Dutch novelists Isabelle de Charrière, Betje Wolff, and Aagje Deken. They were prolific (Wolff and Deken, Polasky tells us, together published some 10,000 pages of novels and commentary) and they confronted through fiction, with an eye on Rousseau, the question of women’s place in an emerging ideal society and the likelihood and benefits of the true liberation of women. This theme is carried on in the

next chapter, on marriage and love affairs seen through correspondence between husbands, wives, and lovers.

Here Polasky’s documentation is especially rich and the contrasts in marital fortunes vivid—contrasts exemplified by, on the one hand, the bitter, tumultuous married life of Nancy Shippen Livingston, in love with Louis Otto, a young French diplomat, but forced, in traditional ways, to marry the wealthy Henry Livingston, a domineering rake who ultimately divorced her on the false ground of infidelity, and on the other the blissful, idealized New World partnership of Ruth and Joel Barlow, whose letters overflow with affection. The Barlows “had decided that in America, young women could freely choose their own companions, and young men did not require



Mary Wollstonecraft; portrait by John Opie, circa 1790–1791

inheritances to earn their way.”

The chapter moves on to another romantic tale, of William Short’s hopeless pursuit of the Duchesse de la Rochefoucauld. She was intrigued, for a while, but she knew well the impossibility of marrying her idealistic, ardent lover who dreamed of an American idyll, with her, in a transformed world. She dropped him gently, at one point on the pretext that she had to take care of her grandmother. The chapter concludes with an account of some unfamiliar views and experiences of Saint John de Crèvecoeur, the famous commentator on American life, the “American Farmer,” and his daughter’s marriage to none other than Louis Otto.

Otto appears also in the next chapter, on decrees. What once was conceived to be the dawning of universal peace became a series of invasions in the name of bringing liberty to oppressed peoples. In this single chapter Polasky traces the cascade of newly invented, short-lived principalities that came and went as the French armies overran the Rhineland, Belgium, Switzerland, and northern Italy, and sought to overthrow English rule in Ireland. She ends the chapter with a “Caribbean Epilogue,” describing how “Haitian revolutionaries secured their independence by defeating the armies of the soon to be crowned emperor of the French.” The history of French expansion in the early Napoleonic years is immensely

complicated, but Polasky has managed to sketch the story and keep the main theme clear—that what had started in the lesser principalities as “idealistic, peace-promoting universalism” had become a world of brutal upheavals dominated by cannons and bayonets.

At the end of the book Polasky writes an elegiac chapter on the ultimate misfortunes of the cosmopolitan travelers who had hoped and striven, in the early revolutionary decades, for the establishment of “universal benevolence” throughout the Atlantic world. By the 1790s their hopes for universal liberty were fading, overcome by the force of nationalism in which they could play no part. The people she has discussed, whose voices had rung with idealism in support of revolutions without borders, had lost credibility and had ended poorly. Brissot, a moderate Girondin who had dreamed of creating a universal confederation of the friends of liberty and truth, had been guillotined; William Short lived alone, “politically adrift”; Kościuszko was first celebrated as a revolutionary hero when he returned to America, but left when he was denounced as pro-French and a mercenary; Barlow had died of consumption in Poland, leaving his widow to fight loneliness in the harsh American democracy; and Paine, after his tumultuous years in Europe, died in New York, attended at his funeral by a cortege of six.

All of the “cosmopolitans” were marginalized by the post-revolutionary nationalism. Yet their struggles for universal human rights, Polasky concludes, “have connected the Atlantic world for more than two hundred years” and “remind us of the impermanence of the borders that obstruct the travel of restless itinerants and their ideals.”

Revolutions Without Borders, its text documented in fifty-nine pages of endnotes and a section on sources that lists what must be several hundred works, is a solid and imaginative work of scholarship. Polasky has gone far toward accomplishing her main purpose, to reveal the

interconnected struggle for universal human rights that spanned the Atlantic and stretched across continents.... From small city-states located in the heart of Europe to islands off the coast of West Africa, revolutionaries shared their dreams of a new world, filling in the arc of the Atlantic Revolution between the American and the French revolutions.

She had difficulties to overcome. The structure of the chapters, defined by different types of documentation, invites repetition and overlap since individuals expressed themselves not in one but several media. The criteria for identifying “itinerant revolutionaries”—“cosmopolitans”—are vague and elusive. People who had no “lasting fame” cannot include Paine, who is featured throughout the book. Some of the narratives within the chapters are so extensive or, as in the case of the Caribbean

upheavals, so complex that it becomes hard at times for the reader to keep the main themes in mind.

More important is the question of spatial dimensions. Polasky extends her reach beyond Europe and western Africa to the “cauldron of insurrection” in Saint Domingue, Guadeloupe, and elsewhere in the Caribbean but includes the Italian principalities only in connection with the Napoleonic invasions. They might well be included in the “cascade” of cries for reform and liberation, to judge from Franco Venturi’s elaborate study of reform movements in eighteenth-century Italy (not mentioned by Polasky though it covers precisely the events in Geneva, Holland, and Belgium that interest her).*

Some of the Italian principalities were hotbeds of reformist zeal, and the struggle of the Corsicans for independence from France produced its own cries for liberty led by Pasquale Paoli, who should surely qualify as one of Polasky’s “cosmopolitan travelers.” And it was Cesare Beccaria, the leader of a group of young reformers in Milan, who wrote one of the most widely read tracts of the time, *On Crimes and Punishments* (1764). That small book swept across Western Europe, from Tuscany to Scandinavia and Russia, and especially to North America, and not only set the goals for universal reform of judicial systems but by clear implication promoted the utopian idea of society as a community of free and equal men.

The links of Polasky’s European “cosmopolites” to Latin American rebels and reformers, who also crossed borders, are more remote. Their great upheavals would come later, and in any case the situation in Spanish and Portuguese America was different from that of Europe, if only because of the dominance of the Catholic Church and the complexities of race. But there were early signs of the revolutionary zeal that would within a single lifetime transform that world. One thinks of the Brazilian intellectuals who sought out Jefferson in Paris for advice on political reform, the overseas students at the University of Coimbra in Portugal who devoured accounts of the American Revolution, and the passion of the martyred Brazilian “Tiradentes” (Joaquim da Silva Xavier), who kept in his pocket a copy of the French translations of the American state constitutions, though knowing no French he had to ask others for translation. So, too, in these years Túpac Amaru led his fatal rebellion in Peru, and the revolt of the Comuneros in Colombia set off its own cascade of local uprisings.

But despite the difficulties Polasky faced in developing her study of a distinctive aspect of Atlantic history at the point of its maximum cohesiveness, she has added to our knowledge of the aspirational breadth and something of the inner lives of the itinerant would-be revolutionaries. Her “cosmopolitan” idealists failed in their utopian programs but they left behind testimonies of their passionate concern for rights that transcend physical and legal boundaries and apply to humanity at large. □

*Of the six volumes of Venturi’s *Settecento riformatore* (Turin: Einaudi, 1969–1990), R. Burr Litchfield has translated into English three substantial volumes (1,452 pages), entitled *The End of the Old Regime in Europe* (Princeton University Press, 1989–1991).

The Incomparable Critic

Charles Simic

The Ocean, the Bird, and the Scholar: Essays on Poets and Poetry

by Helen Vendler.

Harvard University Press, 444 pp., \$35.00

"The critics always get everything wrong," John Ashbery said. Well, some do and some don't. They get on poets' nerves, of course. Not just for the obvious reason that critics can find poems wanting, but even when they admire them, the way they read their poems often makes poets scratch their heads. Big deal, you may be thinking, who reads reviews of poetry books anyhow? If your name is Helen Vendler, thousands do, since her reviews have appeared regularly over the years in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times Book Review*, *The New York Review of Books*, and *The New Republic*, reassuring readers that good poetry continues to be written despite frequent rumors of its demise. It's likely that swept by her enthusiasm, now and then some of them even bought a book, demonstrating that an entrancing review can replicate poetry's venerable use as an aid to seduction.

Her many books range from subjects like Shakespeare, Milton, and George Herbert to Yeats, Stevens, Heaney, and Ashbery, among other recent poets. For Vendler, critics "are evangelists, plucking the public by the sleeve, saying, 'Look at this,' or 'Listen to this.'" Without them the beautiful, subversive, bracing, and demanding legacy of our poets would remain largely unknown.

In her marvelous introduction to *The Ocean, the Bird, and the Scholar*, a collection of two decades' worth of her essays, book reviews, and occasional prose, Vendler gives a brief, forthright account of her career as a critic and of her family background. She grew up in Boston, where her mother taught first grade for fourteen years before she married, and her father taught Spanish, French, and Italian in high school and also taught her and her sister these languages.

As strictly observant Catholics, the family never owned a TV or went to the movies, and when she was old enough, her parents refused their daughter's pleas to attend the Boston's Girls' Latin School and later Radcliffe. They followed Cardinal Cushing's decree forbidding, under pain of mortal sin, education at godless, atheistic, and secular colleges and universities. Instead, she went to a Catholic elementary school, high school, and college, where she majored in chemistry and where literature "was taught as a branch of faith and morals." This experience, she says, inoculated her for life "against adopting any 'ism' as a single lens through which to interpret literature," while her training in sciences taught her to make sure that anything a poet or a critic alleges is backed by evidence.

Vendler attributes becoming a critic to her discovery at the age of twenty-three of the poetry of Wallace Stevens. She had read dozens of poets before him and had memorized many poems, but reading him made her feel "as if my own naked spirit spoke to me from the

Helen Vendler



page." More germane to her future calling was the intuition that a style of such linguistic and structural idiosyncrasy is most likely a reflection of the poet's inner being and personality. Thinking back over her long career, she describes herself as "a critic rather than a scholar, a reader and writer more taken by texts than by contexts." Her own learning, she says modestly, tends to be as wide and unsystematic as that of the poets she discusses. She doesn't care to be called a close reader and a formalist, though like thousands of others in colleges and universities in the 1950s and 1960s, when New Criticism was the dominant critical approach, Vendler was trained to do just that in her English classes.

I. A. Richards, one of the founding fathers of the movement and the author of *The Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) and *Practical Criticism* (1929), taught at Harvard, where she took his course and reports being influenced by his lectures, which showed her how to give full weight to every word in a poem and, with that kind of sustained attention, "open into further and further depths of perception." Despite her background in detailed textual analysis (at which she excels), she prefers the classical label "commentary" or Walter Pater's "aesthetic criticism," in the belief that poems that are complex in thought and style deserve detailed intellectual and critical reflection. She also describes her own method as reading a poem from the point of view of the poet and forewarns her classes that she intends to teach them about the poetry of each poet separately, since poets are too idiosyncratic (that word again) to be compared under gross thematic rubrics that tend to undermine their linguistic originality.

This is an attractive idea, though I'm not clear how feasible it is in practice. There are a lot of things one can de-

duce about a poet by immersing oneself in his or her poems, except what in the work is a result of deliberation and what of fortuitous accidents, since even half the time they don't know where their poems come from. I imagine what she is telling her students is that she will read the poets with sympathy and endeavor to see the world through their eyes. As she writes in the introduction to *The Breaking of Style*, her study of Hopkins, Heaney, and Jorie Graham, published in 1995:

It is distressing, to anyone who cares for and respects the concentrated intellectual and imaginative work that goes into a successful poem, to see how rarely that intense (if instinctive) labor is perceived, remarked on, and appreciated.

She is driven, she says, by the need to clarify to herself and to others, in a reasonable and explicit way, the imaginative individuality of a poem and to show its architectural and technical skill. This is not an easy task, as she readily acknowledges, mentioning how often she's been "brought to mute frustration," knowing "intuitively that something is present" in a poem that she hasn't been able to isolate, name, and describe.

Vendler's ideal critic is someone who not only possesses a solid knowledge of literature and an analytic ability, but whose imagination and sense of taste have been cultivated and refined from living with poetic images and metaphors all her life. Rereading some of her books over the last few months, I learned that this is not just idle talk. Even when I had disagreements with her, I found much of what she had to say about a poem or a poet credible and fresh. Her prose is free of jargon. She has had no interest in criticism that

uses poems solely to demonstrate one of the many literary approaches that have been in fashion during her long academic career, from those centered on language like Structuralism and Deconstruction, to more recent ones based on gender, ethnicity, race, or some other criteria. "But, Helen, you're so narrow," she reports a colleague telling her. To which she replied, "What do you mean, Barbara? All of lyric from Shakespeare till now?" And the answer she got was, "Oh, you know what I mean"—implying that by eschewing lit crit, her work was not only lacking, but not to be taken seriously.

Not that Vendler had always been totally immune to theory. As she says in the introduction to her new book:

I was influenced by Freud, as was natural to a member of my generation, and especially to one reading poets who had undergone psychotherapy: Lowell, Bishop, Berryman, Plath, Sexton.... I learned from Freud's seductive expository style as well as his provocative content. The second resource that influenced me in studying the poets' development and the consequent changes in their style was the discipline of linguistics.... Stylistics is a relatively undefined field, sometimes practiced by linguists, sometimes by critics.... However, linguists and stylisticians too often separate the elements of style from the total imaginative practice of a poet and from the psychological and intellectual motivations of verse. In writing on poets, I have wanted to connect inseparably—as they are connected in the fluent progress of a poem—imagination, feeling, and stylistic originality.

Writing about Robert Lowell in the new book, she speaks of his "depressive style," and sees the "repetitiveness and obstructiveness" in his poems as a symbol of his depression. This brings to mind what Yvor Winters called the "imitative fallacy," a claim "that a poet is justified in employing a disintegrating form in order to express a feeling of disintegration," which he characterized as "merely a sophisticated excuse for bad poetry." She doesn't go as far, because Lowell is a fine poet, but neither her examples nor her argument seems convincing to me. She tends to assume that poems by and large are involuntary or deliberate expressions of their author's traumas—and so they are at times—but they are also works of imagination and accounts of behavior observed in other people's lives.

That poets make things up to make their poems sound more interesting was not news to contemporaries of Homer and Sappho, so it's puzzling to me that we've lost sight of it today. Vendler is on more solid ground arguing that a frustrated erotic desire and the miseries of an unhappy marriage lie behind a number of Stevens's poems. I agree. What she doesn't address, however, is the likelihood that his lack of candor about sex weakened those poems, notwithstanding their stunning imagery and the enthralling verbal play he employed so as to conceal himself.

“The natural act of a critic is to compare, and I was always comparing,” Vendler says about herself, and the same is true of poets. They read and reread the poets of the past and imitate both the major figures and minor ones, and through that slow, laborious process, beset with danger, eventually form their own poetic identity. Every original poem is a critical act, since it involves a decision by the poet about what to keep and what to discard from the poetry of the past. In Harold Bloom’s provocative study *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), “the poet in a poem” is at the mercy of his forerunners; either he can overcome them if he is a “strong poet,” or he’ll be destroyed by them.

When she started out as a critic, Vendler had her own version of poetic influence, arguing that American poets like Stevens and others were fixated on British poetry (Wordsworth and Keats particularly) and had continued to rewrite their poems long into this century. There is truth in that; many of our poets started as descendants of the Romantics, though this leaves out the influence of nineteenth-century French poetry, without which there would be no American modernism. Now happily Vendler is more willing to give Whitman and Dickinson and European poets their due.

Vendler says that she likes indolent and meditative poets who roam freely in their thinking about a subject, giving Stevens, Keats, and George Herbert as examples, and she is at her finest explicating intricate, many-layered, longer poems that require unraveling ambiguities and following every nuance of meaning, every delicate turn of the argument. For her, Emily Dickinson ends her poems too soon. Poems in the “rebellious Anglophobic strain of American literary primitivism,” in the manner of William Carlos Williams and his followers, do not attract her. She’s drawn to ideas in poems, conveys them well, but tends at times to devalue physical setting, “what the eye beholds,” as if it were only a prop and not the hook that draws the reader in. The “poet’s sense of the world,” “the savor of life,” “the vulgate of experience” as Stevens called it—she often doesn’t do justice to these in my view.

I have in mind her analysis of a poem like “The Idea of Order at Key West,” where she follows the poet’s thinking well enough, but doesn’t show how closely tied Stevens’s meditation is to the changes taking place in the sea and the sky as the tropical night descends and the unknown woman walking along the shore sings her song, and why the speaker in the poem not only comes to understand what he is experiencing, but once he does is overcome with emotion, and so are we as readers. We are moved because we had experienced something like that once and couldn’t find words for it, and now have them. It’s that recognition that links the reader to the poet, and its interdependence of reality and imagination that Stevens strives to sort out in the poem.

There are twenty-seven essays collected in *The Ocean, the Bird, and the Scholar*. In them, Vendler writes about Whitman, Melville, T. S. Eliot, Stevens (twice), Langston Hughes, Bishop, Lowell, Berryman, Allen Ginsberg, A. R. Ammons (twice), Ashbery (three

times), Merrill (twice), Amy Clampitt, Charles Wright, Seamus Heaney (twice), Mark Ford (twice), and Lucie Brock-Broido. It’s one of her finest books, an impressive summation of a long, distinguished career in which she revisits many of the poets she has venerated over a lifetime and written about previously. Reading it, one can feel her happiness in doing what she loves best. There is scarcely a page in the book where there isn’t a fresh insight about a poet or poetry. Here’s a small sampling. On Ammons:

The Snow Poems suggests that the weather, as the most complex of visible dynamic systems, is the best symbol for human moods. For Ammons, the weather plays the role that color plays in painting....



Elizabeth Bishop and John Ashbery, University of Oklahoma, 1976

Just as each collocation of colors has for both painter and spectator its own emotional weight, and each collocation of words, for both writer and reader, has its own atmosphere, so the weather—down to its minutest aspects—determines the “feel” on our skin and our sense of any given day.

On Stevens:

Stevens is taken aback by the poverty of memory. When we summon up the past, it is usually, he says, in the form of a set of visual images. We cannot... hear the past or touch it or taste it or smell it. How odd it is that we can only *see* the past, that no other sense (in Stevens’s view here) has the capacity to return and reproduce itself in memory.

On Graham:

One form of suffering—seeing the day go by unregistered and unrecorded—is brought to an end.

On Whitman:

The value system of an original poet—and therefore of his or her poems—will be in part consonant with, in part in dispute with, the contemporary values of the society from which he, and they, issue. Were the poetry not intelligible with respect to those social values, it could not be read; were it not at a distance from them in some way, it would not be original.

The essay called “Poetry and the Mediation of Value,” on Whitman’s great poem on the death of Lincoln, “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d,” is one of the most moving Vendler has ever written. She describes his elegy as having “Roman succinctness and taciturnity” in that it never mentions the assassination or the assassin, the Emancipation Proclamation or other famous acts of Lincoln’s presidency. Instead, like a movie camera, the poem renders the very scenes of mourning, making them unroll before our eyes in what seems real time as the coffin travels on a train from town to town, from Washington to Springfield, Illinois, with the poet remaining discreetly in the background throughout the poem and, as she says, speaking calmly like a recording angel. Vendler’s inspired commentary not only does justice to Whitman’s poem, but ends up being as wise and poignant.

Unlike other reviewers (William Logan comes to mind) who range widely and write trenchantly about many more poets, Vendler has devoted herself to a small group of favorites who in her opinion have demonstrated staying power, and has written about them almost exclusively with affection. We understand only what we admire, appears to be how she defines the art of criticism. That is most likely true, even though, by not telling us what works and what doesn’t in their poetry, she leaves us frequently irritated and in the dark about her criteria, since withholding judgment while reading is not how we normally go through a book of poems. As her recent essay on John Berryman in these pages demonstrates, she is perfectly capable of making such distinctions when she chooses.* (The piece is included in her new book.)

Setting that aside, there are obvious benefits to concentrating on few poets and deepening one’s knowledge and understanding of their work over many years. Still, by leaving out of her deliberations so many American poets of the last hundred years and not considering the likelihood that some of them may have played a part in the development of the poets she favors, one gets an odd, ahistorical picture that every poet and devoted reader of our poetry, and even fans of her criticism—among whom I count myself—would have trouble accepting, since it excludes many beautiful and occasionally great poems that are a part of our literature.

It’s not that Vendler never changes her mind. Unless I’m greatly mistaken, Lowell and Bishop are diminished figures in the new book, while others like Graham, Ashbery, and Ammons, with their ability to continuously reinvent themselves, appear unequaled among their contemporaries. “Poetry should surprise by a fine excess,” she quotes Keats approvingly. This is the quality her poets all share. Vendler describes the ambition of Graham’s poems as a desire for aesthetic possession of everything that goes on around us and inside our minds, a kind of “total coverage,” as it was for Whitman.

When it comes to “opening up new possibilities for the American lyric,” Ashbery, more than anyone else, ac-

cording to her, has led the way. He has done that

by enlivening the page with diction of a startling heterogeneity; by being more broadly allusive than any other modern poet, including Eliot; by being boyish and amusing while maintaining emotional depth; by finding a gorgeousness of imagery rare since Stevens; and by taking headstrong risks that have endangered whole books (notably *The Tennis Court Oath*), but which have paid off in original forms of narrative and fable.

I agree with much of this, but again question the omission (for the sake of comparison) of Frank O’Hara, Kenneth Koch, James Tate, and a number of other poets, going back to Theodore Roethke, Kenneth Rexroth, and Robert Creeley, who also tinkered interestingly with the lyric. “There is in [Ashbery’s] poetry,” Vendler observes,

a persistent sense of plot aborted, of journeys on circular tracks, of aspiration engaged in and mocked, of synapses of allusion constantly making electrical sparks and then fizzling out. Human meaning is made and exploded, and no larger backdrop of sustained systematic thought or belief guarantees either its fittingness or its permanence.

This is a brilliant summary of his practice, but as a universal recipe for lyric poetry, it is not likely to work if some cook other than Ashbery is stirring the pot.

What about Ammons? Are he and Ashbery as different as night and day? Not so, according to Vendler. Theirs is a poetry that acknowledges the fragmentation and contradictions of our contemporary lives, in which we find ourselves bombarded verbally and visually from all sides in an information-laden, secular, and baffling world, in what feels like a continuous present where various distractions and surprises following one another constitute our day. Despite one being a poet of small-town rural America and the other being a city slicker, they both write poems that are either tightly constructed or sprawling, use elevated or colloquial language, mix tragedy and comedy, and are fond of adopting tentative, provisional, or irreverent attitudes.

And yet Ammons’s literary antecedents are very different from Ashbery’s. Vendler finds them “in Williams’s experiments in disjunction, in Stein’s experiments with childish aspects of language, in Thoreau’s wood watching, in Whitman’s broad democratic vistas, in Frost’s shapeliness of form, even in the Beats.” However none of these had the audacity, she points out, to switch back and forth between the sublime and the ignobly ridiculous as Ammons did. While Williams, most notably in *Paterson*, distinguishes the flute of the solo lyric from the clamor of the communal, she notes that for Ammons there is a “continuo of the personal—the ‘noise’ of the everyday mind—from which the lyric rises and into which it subsides.” This setting “of the lyric moment within its non-lyric ‘surround,’” Vendler writes, “is the fundamental

*See her “Berryman: Tragedy & Comedy Together,” *The New York Review*, June 4, 2015.

device” of modern poetry, from *The Waste Land* to this day.

I find her discussion of these two poets’ poems cogent and her high regard for them justified. Ashbery’s reputation is firmly established with his *Collected Poems 1956–1987*, published by the Library of America, and with the rest of his opus to follow, but

I’m afraid that Ammons, who died in 2001 and left a body of work as varied and inventive as Ashbery’s, is no longer read very much and somewhat forgotten. If there’s a revived interest in him in the future, it will be due to Vendler and some young critic or poet who picks up *The Ocean, the Bird, and the Scholar* and reads her immensely en-

tertaining and stimulating account of his poems, especially the book-length poem *Garbage*. He wrote it after seeing a gigantic pyramid of rubble in Florida that made him feel that this is “the sacred image of our time.”

I went and reread Ammons and other poets Vendler writes about and thought better of them and enjoyed my-

self immensely doing so. Arguing with her from time to time, I thought this is what a great critic does, makes us read, either for the first time, or once again, a book or a poem we either ought to have known or thought we knew and understood well, and then find our lives enriched when we discover we were wrong about it. □

What Is Wrong with the West’s Economies?

Edmund Phelps

What is wrong with the economies of the West—and with economics? It depends on whether we are talking about the good or the just.

Many of us in Western Europe and America feel that our economies are far from just, though our views on justice differ somewhat. One band of economists, led for decades by the British economist Anthony Atkinson, sees the West as being in another Gilded Age of inequality in income and wealth.¹ Adopting Jeremy Bentham’s utilitarian view, they would redistribute income from those in high brackets to those farther down—until we reach the highest “sum of utilities.” It is a question, though, whether this doctrine captures intuitive views of what is just.

Philosophers over these same decades have been more interested in the work by the American philosopher John Rawls. His book *A Theory of Justice* argues for a fundamental shift away from Bentham: economic justice is about the distribution of “utilities,” for him a word usually denoting the satisfactions of consumption and leisure, not the sum of those utilities.² It is about the terms on which each participant contributes to the fruit of the society’s economy. For Rawls, justice requires the state to use taxes and subsidies to pull up people with the lowest wages to the highest level possible. That way, the least advantaged get the largest possible portion of the gain from people’s cooperation in the economy.

A struggle persists between these views. The Benthamite view has morphed into the corporatist idea that a nation’s government ought to provide benefits, whether in the form of money or tax advantages, or free services, to interest groups—whether corporations, or unions, or consumers—that voice a need until more benefits would be deemed to



Jacob Lawrence: The Builders, 1947

cost too much. Meeting these claims of many different interests has left little in the public purse for low-wage workers.

The Rawlsian view has found little support among legislators, it is true. In the US, the Earned Income Tax Credit was passed in 1975. But it mainly supplements the income of low-wage mothers of young children. It does nothing for low-end workers as a whole and, to some extent, it actually reduces paychecks for low-paid work of childless women and single men. In Europe, a few countries spend much more than the US on job subsidies but statistical analyses have not found large effects on wages or unemployment.

With little or no effective policy initiative giving a lift to the less advantaged, the jarring market forces of the past four decades—mainly the slowdowns in productivity that have spread over the West and, of course, globalization, which has moved much low-wage manufacturing to Asia—have proceeded, unopposed, to drag down both employment and wage rates at the low end. The setback has cost the less advantaged not only a loss of income but also a loss of what economists call *inclusion*—access to jobs offering work and pay that provide self-respect. And inclusion was already lacking to begin with. In America, black urban teenagers have long been lacking in inclusion. In France there is a comparable lack of inclusion among North Africans. In much of Europe there has been little

attempt to include the Roma.

This failing in the West’s economies is also a failing of economics. The classical idea of political economy has been to let wage rates sink to whatever level the market takes them, and then provide everyone with the “safety net” of a “negative income tax,” unemployment insurance, and free food, shelter, clothing, and medical care. This policy, even when humanely carried out, and it often is not, misses the point that, even if we confine our attention to the West since the Renaissance, many people have long felt the desire to do something with their lives besides consuming goods and having leisure. They desire to participate in a community in which they can interact and develop.

Our prevailing political economy is blind to the very concept of inclusion; it does not map out any remedy for the deficiency. A monograph of mine and a conference volume I edited are among the few book-length studies of ways to remedy failure to include people generally in an economy in which they will have satisfying work.³

Commentators are talking now about injustice of another sort. Workers in

decent jobs view the economy as unjust if they or their children have virtually no chance of climbing to a higher rung in the socioeconomic ladder. And moving up appears harder now. Even in the Gilded Age, many of the moguls came up from the bottom. (The rungs were far apart, yet the ladder was climbed.) The feeling of injustice comes from a sense of unfair advantages: that those above are using their connections to stay there—or to ensure that their children can follow them. The bar to upward mobility is always the same: barriers to competition put up by the wealthy, the connected, corporations, professional associations, unions, and guilds.

But the truth is that no degree of Rawlsian action to pull up low-end wages and employment—or remove unfair advantages—could have spared the less advantaged from a major loss of inclusion since Rawls’s time. The forces of productivity slowdown and globalization have been too strong. Moreover, though the injustices in the West’s economies are egregious, they ought not to be seen as a major cause of the productivity slowdowns and globalization. (For one thing, a slowdown of productivity started in the US in the mid-1960s and the sharp loss of manufacturing jobs to poorer countries occurred much later—from the late 1970s to the early 1990s.) Deeper causes must be at work.

While people need a just economy for their self-respect and national pride—Rawls regarded justice as the first virtue of a society—justice is not everything that people need from their economy. They need an economy that is good as well as just. And for some decades, the Western economies have fallen short of any conception of a “good economy”—an economy offering a “good life,” or a life of “richness,” as some humanists call it.

The good life as it is popularly conceived typically involves acquiring mastery in one’s work, thus gaining for oneself better terms—or means to rewards, whether material, like wealth, or nonmaterial—an experience we may call “prospering.” As humanists and philosophers have conceived it, the good life involves using one’s imagination, exercising one’s creativity, taking fascinating journeys into the unknown, and acting on the world—an experience I call “flourishing.” These gains are gains in experience, not in material reward, though material gains may be a means to the nonmaterial ends. As the writer Kabir Sehgal put it, “Money

¹An early work of Atkinson’s is *Economics of Inequality* (Oxford University Press, 1975); for a review of his most recent book, *Inequality: What Can Be Done?* (Harvard University Press, 2015), see Thomas Piketty, *The New York Review*, June 25, 2015. I was struck by a presentation by Atkinson, “The Social Marginal Valuation of Income,” at the conference celebrating the seventieth birthday of Sir James Mirrlees, Clare College, Cambridge, July 28, 2006.

²*A Theory of Justice* (Harvard University Press, 1971). The book sees a society’s economy as central to the people, arguing that they are drawn together by their desire for mutual gains from collaborating in its economy.

³*Rewarding Work: How to Restore Participation and Self-Support to Free Enterprise* (Harvard University Press, 1997) and *Designing Inclusion: How to Raise Low-End Pay and Employment in Private Enterprise* (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

is like blood. You need it to live but it isn't the point of life."⁴

How might such a good life prevail in a society? Historically, as my book *Mass Flourishing* argues,⁵ prospering and flourishing became prevalent in the nineteenth century when, in Europe and America, economies emerged with the dynamism to generate their own innovation. Responding to the challenges and opportunities of an ever-evolving economy, the more entrepreneurial participants were immersed in the experience of solving the new problems and overcoming the new hurdles posed in the process of innovation: these people were "prospering." Sparked by the new spirit of dynamism, the more innovative participants were constantly trying to think of new ways to produce things or new things to produce: these people were "flourishing."

What were the origins of this dynamism? It sprang from the development of a favorable culture. In nineteenth-century Britain and America, and later Germany and France, a culture of exploration, experimentation, and ultimately innovation grew out of the individualism of the Renaissance, the vitalism of the Baroque era, and the expressionism of the Romantic period. In view of the explosion in poetry, music, and art in the "creative" sector of the

economy, it should not surprise us that imagination exploded in the rest of the economy too. In these years George Stephenson conceived the steam railway, John Deere the cast-steel plow that "broke the plains"; Isaac Singer developed and marketed a commercial sewing machine, Thomas Edison the phonograph, the Lumière brothers the cinema, and Florence Nightingale effected a reorganization of hospitals. Innovation was rampant—and very apparently in America, as observers testified. Abraham Lincoln, touring America in 1858, exclaimed that the country had "a great passion—a perfect rage—for the 'new.'"⁶

What made innovating so powerful in these economies was that it was not limited to elites. It permeated society from the less advantaged parts of the population on up. People of ordinary background might be involved in innovations, large and small. Stephenson was illiterate, Deere a blacksmith, Singer a machinist, Edison of humble origins. People of ordinary ability could also have innovative ideas. As I wrote in *Mass Flourishing*, "Even people with few and modest talents...were given the experience of using their minds: to seize an opportunity, to solve a problem, and think of a new way or a new thing."

The experience of working in these dynamic economies was evidently good for most people—far better than the previous economies were, at any rate. Diaries of the period contradict the

old familiar tune that the rural life of mercantile times, with its routine and isolation, was preferred to modern life in businesses and cities.⁷

It may be that some other economies lacked (and still lack) the wages for large numbers of ordinary people to afford to pursue careers in which they could prosper or flourish; or they lacked enough jobs for large numbers of people to have those opportunities. High-enough wages, low-enough unemployment, and wide-enough access to engaging work are necessary for a "good-enough" economy—though far from sufficient. The material possibilities of the economy must be adequate for the nonmaterial possibilities to be widespread—the satisfactions of prospering and of flourishing through adventurous, creative, and even imaginative work.

Some economists maintain that nations do not need dynamism to be happy. The French and Italians seem to find it perfectly acceptable that their economies have been almost devoid of indigenous innovation for nearly two decades. They are content with an economy unable to do more than simply let global market forces—including advances in science at home and abroad—pull up the going level of wage rates and prop up the market rates of return on wealth. (In fact, little upward

movement of real wages has been occurring of late in the advanced economies.) But from my perspective, such an economy is pitiful next to an economy with significant prospering and flourishing—let alone the economies of heady innovation in the West's past. Oddly, this pitiful sort of economy is very much like the theoretical models of classical economics.

In the classical models I have been describing, no one is trying to think up something new (except perhaps new profitable investments) and no one is attempting to create it. There is no conception of human agency, only responses to wages, interest rates, and wealth. The economy is mechanical, robotic. The crops may be growing, but there is no personal growth. In the classical canon, Bentham, with his "sum of utilities," portrays individuals like machines working to contribute their share to the general welfare. Joseph Schumpeter portrays "innovation" as produced by hard-driving entrepreneurs who make "obvious" applications of discoveries occurring outside the nation's economy—as if the economy's central participants possessed no imagination whatever.

Such classical models are basic to today's standard economics. This economics, despite its sophistication in some respects, makes no room for economies in which people are imagining new products and using their creativity to build them. What is most fundamentally "wrong with economics" is that it takes such an economy to be the norm—to be "as good as it gets." The cost is that elements of the Western economies are becoming products

⁴Kabir Sehgal, *Coined: The Rich Life of Money and How Its History Has Shaped Us* (Grand Central, 2015).

⁵*Mass Flourishing: How Grassroots Innovation Created Jobs, Challenge, and Change* (Princeton University Press, 2013).

⁶Abraham Lincoln, "Discoveries and Inventions," Young Men's Association, Bloomington, Illinois, April 6, 1858.

⁷See Emma Griffiths, *Liberty's Dawn: A People's History of the Industrial Revolution* (Yale University Press, 2013). Her current work, as yet unpublished, has reached farther into the nineteenth century, where some of the findings are equally or more striking.

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of this basically classical economics, which has little place for creativity and imagination.

Since around 1970, or earlier in some cases, most of the continental Western European economies have come to resemble more completely the mechanical model of standard economics. Most companies are highly efficient. Households, apart from the very low-paid or unemployed, have gone on saving, each year pushing up their wealth to higher levels, spectacular levels in Italy and France—far higher than in America, leaving aside the super-rich. And with the rise of household wealth contracting the supply of labor, workweeks and labor force participation have been shrinking.

One could argue that the continental economies are marching—D.H. Lawrence’s “everlasting slog” comes to mind—along a path of ever-increasing wealth like that derived mathematically by Frank Ramsey long ago. That study inspired John Maynard Keynes’s influential essay in which he praised the decline of work as liberating the human spirit.⁸ Keynes seemed to think that ordinary people are incapable of prospering or flourishing. Even now, many Europeans seem not to have grasped that, while comparatively rich in wealth and spare time, they are poor in the conditions for the good life: an economy conducive to flourishing and prospering. The causes of this decline are clear.

In most of Western Europe, economic dynamism is now at lows not seen, I would judge, since the advent of dynamism in the nineteenth century. Imagining and creating new products has almost disappeared from the continent—a continent that had been a major wellspring of new industries and new ways of living. Growth there has stopped, and econometric estimates of the rate of homegrown innovation are generally small. The near disappearance of imaginative and creative activity has reduced indigenous innovation, contracted investment activity, and depressed the demand for labor.

The bleak levels of both unemployment and job satisfaction in Europe are testimony to its dreary economies. Polls can produce simplistic responses to questions about complex feelings; but it should not be puzzling that a recent survey of household attitudes found that, in “happiness,” the median scores in Spain (54), France (51), Italy (48), and Greece (37) are all *below* those in the upper half of the nations labeled “emerging”—Mexico (79), Venezuela (74), Brazil (73), Argentina (66), Vietnam (64), Colombia (64), China (59), Indonesia (58), Chile (58), and Malaysia (56).⁹ As I wrote in a commentary on western continental Europe, “the economy is failing society.”¹⁰

⁸See F.P. Ramsey, “A Mathematical Theory of Saving,” *The Economic Journal* (1928), and J. M. Keynes, “The Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren,” *The Nation and the Athenaeum* (1930, in two parts).

⁹“People in Emerging Markets Catch Up to Advanced Economies in Life Satisfaction,” Pew Research Center, October 2014. (Performing better were the UK at 58, Germany at 60, and the US at 65.)

¹⁰“Europe Is a Continent That Has Run Out of Ideas,” *Financial Times*, March 3, 2015.

The US economy is not much better. Two economists, Stanley Fischer and Assar Lindbeck, wrote of a “Great Productivity Slowdown,” which they saw as beginning in the late 1960s.¹¹ The slowdown in the growth of capital and labor combined—what is called “total factor productivity”—is stark and, with the exception of the years of the Internet boom, between 1996 and 2004, it has not let up; it has only gotten slower since the 1960s. In my analysis, the slowdown is the source of the deep decline in wage growth, labor force participation, and, on some evidence, in job satisfaction. Markedly fewer lead the good life. (As in continental Europe, the slowing of productivity growth caused wage growth to slow, and many households kept adding to their wealth through savings, all of which has been dragging participation down. Yet America’s productivity slowdown started earlier, so the cumulative damage to participation has been greater than Europe’s to date.)

What is the mechanism of the slowdown in productivity? Many commentators and laymen suppose that the dramatic rise of innovation in Silicon Valley has displaced labor and slowed the rise of wages at the low end and the middle. We have all observed the disappearance of bookstores, record stores, and many other kinds of stores, as well as newsprint. But if innovation in the aggregate were up, it would be hard to explain why growth of aggregate total factor productivity is so unmistakably down. As Alvin Hansen said many decades ago, it is the “cessation of growth,” or, as he implied, the slowdown of aggregate innovation, “which is disastrous.”¹²

The plausible explanation of the syndrome in America—the productivity slowdown and the decline of job satisfaction, among other things—is a critical loss of indigenous innovation in the established industries like traditional manufacturing and services that was not nearly offset by the innovation that flowered in a few new industries—digital, media, and financial. In the vast heartland of America, the loss of dynamism is almost palpable—and not just in the oft-cited education and health care industries. Companies like Google and Facebook may offer jobs allowing or requiring imagination and creativity, but the whole of Silicon Valley accounts for only 3 percent of national income and a smaller percentage of national employment. Once European economies ran out of American innovations they could copy, the syndrome of low productivity growth hit them too—France and Italy in the late 1990s, Germany and Britain by 2005 or so. That most European economies appear to be in worse condition than the

¹¹See Assar Lindbeck, “The Recent Slowdown of Productivity Growth,” *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 93, No. 369 (March 1983), and Stanley Fischer, “Symposium on the Slowdown in Productivity Growth,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Fall 1988). Lindbeck begins, “The growth slowdown that began in the late 1960s or early 1970s is the most significant macroeconomic development of the last two decades.”

¹²Alvin H. Hansen, “Economic Progress and Declining Population Growth,” *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (March 1939).

American in labor force participation and job satisfaction can be laid to America’s noticeable edge in innovation. That has kept America a step ahead.

What then caused this narrowing of innovation? No single explanation is persuasive. Yet two classes of explanations have the ring of truth. One points to suppression of innovation by vested interests. Their power has risen enormously in Western Europe and finally America over the postwar decades. Invoking corporatist notions of economic control and social contract originating in the *corporazioni* of ancient Rome, some



Fernand Léger:
The Construction Workers, 1950

professions, such as those in education and medicine, have instituted regulation and licensing to curb experimentation and change, thus dampening innovation.

Invoking the corporatist notion of solidarity, companies hurt by innovators—as GM was hurt by BMW and Toyota—have been able to obtain federal government bailouts to help them regain their positions. As a result, fleeting innovators—BMW and Toyota in my example—often lose money in their attempts. So would-be innovators will think twice before trying again to innovate in America’s automobile market.

Invoking the corporatist tenet of social protection, established corporations—their owners and stakeholders—and entire industries, using their lobbyists, have obtained regulations and patents that make it harder for new firms to gain entry into the market and to compete with incumbents. A result is that the outsiders have been stifled—though some entered new industries before those too could put up barriers. And some insiders, now protected from new entrants, feel it is safe to drop whatever defensive innovation they used to do. We can see dramatic examples of how these barriers protect insiders in the pharmaceutical and the medical device industries, where the FDA approvals process has blocked new entry and slowed innovation to a crawl. Insiders feel free to raise their markups, thus increasing profits and wealth inequality.

We can test this theory. Bureau of Labor Statistics data on the US non-farm business sector show labor’s share of income falling from 66 percent at its twin peaks in the mid-1970s to 61 percent in the 1990s and around 58 percent more recently. OECD data on business sectors show a rise in capital’s share from 32.5 percent in 1971–1981 to 34.5 percent in 1995–1997 in the US and

from 33.3 percent to 38.5 percent in the European Union.¹³

The second explanation points to a new repression of potential innovators by families and schools. As the corporatist values of control, solidarity, and protection are invoked to prohibit innovation, traditional values of conservatism and materialism are often invoked to inhibit a young person from undertaking an innovation. Schools are doing less to expose the young to the great books of adventure and personal development. Parents teach their children from infancy to be careful and stay close to the family. There is discussion now of the overprotected child: the need for a return to “free range” children who are allowed to explore, to try things and take chances.¹⁴ Parents urge their children upon graduating to take a secure job with high pay, not a job at a startup. Many universities are now teaching courses in “responsible investing” but nothing on venturesome investing.

How might Western nations gain—or regain—widespread prospering and flourishing? Taking concrete actions will not help much without fresh thinking: people must first grasp that standard economics is not a guide to flourishing—it is a tool only for efficiency. Widespread flourishing in a nation requires an economy energized by its own homegrown innovation from the grassroots on up. For such innovation a nation must possess the dynamism to imagine and create the new—economic freedoms are not sufficient. And dynamism needs to be nourished with strong human values.

Of the concrete steps that would help to widen flourishing, a reform of education stands out. The problem here is not a perceived mismatch between skills taught and skills in demand. (Experts have urged greater education in STEM subjects—science, technology, engineering, and mathematics—but when Europe created specialized universities in these subjects, no innovation was observed.) The problem is that young people are not taught to see the economy as a place where participants may imagine new things, where entrepreneurs may want to build them and investors may venture to back some of them. It is essential to educate young people to this image of the economy.

It will also be essential that high schools and colleges expose students to the human values expressed in the masterpieces of Western literature, so that young people will want to seek economies offering imaginative and creative careers. Education systems must put students in touch with the humanities in order to fuel the human desire to conceive the new and perchance to achieve innovations. This reorientation of general education will have to be supported by a similar reorientation of economic education.

We will all have to turn from the classical fixation on wealth accumulation and efficiency to a modern economics that places imagination and creativity at the center of economic life. □

¹³OECD, *Economic Outlook*, December 1998.

¹⁴See Hanna Rosin, “The Overprotected Kid,” *The Atlantic*, April 2014, and Lenore Skenazy, *Free-Range Kids: How to Raise Safe, Self-Reliant Children (Without Going Nuts with Worry)*, (Jossey-Bass, 2009).

Discovery, Bewilderment, Joy

Claire Messud

Ashes in My Mouth, Sand in My Shoes

by Per Petterson, translated
from the Norwegian by Don Bartlett.
Graywolf, 118 pp., \$14.00 (paper)

I Refuse

by Per Petterson, translated
from the Norwegian by Don Bartlett.
Graywolf, 282 pp., \$25.00

Readers of the Norwegian writer Per Petterson will already know him to be a master of strenuously achieved economy. Like a painter working with a restricted palette, he evokes a considerable, urgent range of emotion and experience from his intimately known surroundings: just as Alice Munro knows her territory of western Ontario down to bedrock, Petterson, too, knows each tussock and divot of his native Norway. His subjects are the intense and ineffable relationships within families and between boyhood friends; his settings are working-class apartments or row houses, or log cabins in the expansive forest, with occasional forays over the water to Denmark. Into and around this intractable matter flows the river of time itself, with its flotsam of nostalgia, pain, and regret: the unforgettable title of his 2008 novel *I Curse the River of Time* could serve for almost any of his works.

This spring sees the publication in English of two works by Petterson: one, his most recent novel, *I Refuse* (2012); the other, *Ashes in My Mouth, Sand in My Shoes*, his first story collection, originally published in Norway in 1987. Both are beautifully rendered in English by Don Bartlett, who also translated *It's Fine by Me* (1992). While firmly distinct in tone, style, and subject matter, the two books are nevertheless both emphatically Pettersonian; and both succeed in allowing us, in different ways, glimpses of something like light.

Many of his novels take as their protagonist Petterson's alter ego Arvid Jansen, whose progress from boyhood to the crises of middle age—divorce, loss, and death—provides an emotionally powerful cumulative portrait. By now, we've traveled with him (albeit not chronologically) from the comparative brightness of *It's Fine by Me*, the account of a thorny adolescence in which Arvid plays a supporting role to his best friend, Audun Sletten; to the bleached disenchantment of *I Curse the River of Time*, in which Arvid's marriage is disintegrating and his mother receives a terminal diagnosis; to the naked grief of *In the Wake* (2000), in which a forty-three-year-old Arvid struggles to recover from the loss of his parents and siblings in a ferry accident (a tragedy that in fact befell Petterson's own family, killed in the 1990 *Scandinavian Star* disaster).

Each of these books carries its own measure of violence and dread; even in *It's Fine by Me*, the boys' suburban coming-of-age is punctuated by a brother's accidental death, by beatings, abandonment, and, for Audun, memories of family brutality and the near-ghostly menace of a murderous father. Until now, for English readers, Arvid's has been a world in which Eden is al-

ready long lost; in which hope is stringently tempered by bleak experience.

With the belated publication of Petterson's first book, *Ashes in My Mouth, Sand in My Shoes*, a short collection of stories about Arvid's childhood in the 1960s, we are granted a glimpse of Arvid in a state of bemused wonder, trailing his Wordsworthian clouds of glory, engaged in the adventure of understanding his world. The English version is understandably dedicated to Petterson's father: the book opens and closes with Arvid's dad, and with Arvid's complex and evolving love for him.



Per Petterson on his farm in Norway, 2000

"A Man Without Shoes," the book's first story, begins thus:

Dad had a face that Arvid loved to watch, and at the same time made him nervous as it wasn't just a face but also a rock in the forest with its furrows and hollows, at least if he squinted when he looked.

Almost offhandedly, Petterson conveys a small child's apprehension of his own passivity before his father—the face "that Arvid loved to watch"—and of the man's metaphorical stature as a monument of nature, and an austere one at that.

Once we grasp that this face—this rock in the forest—is Arvid's earliest and abiding understanding of manhood, then the recurring importance in his later life of mastering nature becomes suddenly obvious. Arvid's is a world in which actions must speak, because words are in short supply. As Petterson notes in a later story:

Dad had a strong back. He was always doing stuff, as often as not with his back to Arvid, and it lived its own life inside the blue T-shirt with its large patches of dark sweat in the sun and the heat. Arvid could watch it for ages and feel at ease.

In all the Arvid Jansen novels to follow, whether they are fishing, rowing, building, or chopping down trees, Petter-

son's men are most admirable in their physical competence, their ability to transform the natural world.

"A Man Without Shoes," brief and delicate, is a story about the event that strips Arvid's Dad of his rocklike divinity, and reduces him forever, in his son's eyes. Frank Jansen has worked in various shoe factories, and been promoted to a job in Denmark, leaving the family in Norway. The family is proud of his trade, and of his professional ascent; but he returns home just six months later out of work, a bit drunk, with some gifts from the duty-free. His brother Rolf procures a job for Frank

in his own workplace, a local toothbrush factory, a demotion for which young Arvid scorns his father:

There were limits to how much you could say about something as stupid as toothbrushes.

Shoes, on the other hand, there was a lot to say about them.... Dad talked a lot about shoes, and he knew what he was talking about. But now it was over. Now you couldn't even say the word "sole" aloud. If you did Dad would lose his temper.

Before long, Dad throws away the "rolls of leather and the shoe samples" and the "huge basket of shoe lasts, lasts of all sizes, elegant and shiny with their varnish," that he'd kept at home to work on in his spare time, and that had excited his son's admiration. Frank Jansen's only comment, as he burns the lasts in the stove, is: "Now I'm a man without shoes!" His young son's riposte—"I know.... Now you're a man with toothbrushes!"—marks the moment in which the man is shamed before his boy, and his diminishment acknowledged.

"The Black Car" gives us Arvid's grandfather's death, seen from young Arvid's perspective: the extended family is at their country cabin for the weekend, ostensibly relaxing but in fact waiting for the news: "The only person

who had done anything of any importance apart from Dad was Granddad, and he was going to die this Sunday, he was probably dead already, but they didn't know that yet."

Arvid and his older sister Gry are about to go swimming when Granddad's neighbor arrives by car to relay the information: "Arvid turned away, for there was something so strange about his dad's face that he couldn't look." When he turns back, his father is inside the car, heading off. Their mother's only comment is: "Be good children now, because your Granddad has died."

The echoes of that death spill into "The King Is Dead," set on the day of Granddad's funeral, in which young Arvid's imagination conflates the deaths of Norway's king (in his bathtub!), of a bullfinch in the garden that he has held in his hand, and of his grandfather. With a child's irrepressible awareness of comedy, he notes the priest at the funeral: "his cassock swirling round his legs like a ball gown, and everyone could see his green-checked socks"; and with a child's ebullience, he insists upon life in defiance of his new understanding of death: "It didn't matter because Dad was alive and Arvid was alive and he started to jump up and down, he was smiling all over his face."

Arvid's spontaneity and quixotic child's logic shape these pieces. When he wets the bed, he uses "his secret trick and it always worked. Every time he had wet himself he put the clammy underpants under the dresser and the next night they were gone. It was like magic...." When a local man known as Fatso cries in front of him, Arvid reflects: "He had never seen a grown man cry. It was something you stopped doing around the time you were confirmed, the way you stopped wearing nappies a little earlier." We learn that "he imagined that the world was once completely flat and the bombs that fell during THE WAR, in his mind like big heavy bumble bees, had formed the landscape the way it was now."

Arvid's childhood is shadowed by death and the legacy of World War II and also by the threat of nuclear annihilation; but his leveling exuberance for life enables him to see all threats as surmountable. More than that, it enables him to console his felled father when, in "Before the War," on a fishing trip to the cabin with Uncle Rolf, his father slips in the water while attempting, drunkenly, to launch their rotten canoe:

Dad landed with his head in Arvid's lap.... He saw for the first time that Dad was turning bald. He stroked the thinning wet hair and said:

"Shhh, Dad, it will be fine, everything'll be fine, right?" Dad turned his head up to look at him and then he was sick, it gushed from his mouth and down Arvid's legs.

"It's OK, Dad," Arvid said.

This, in the collection's final story, is the moment of reversal in which the son becomes father to the man, accepting him in his weakness, offering succor

and consolation. Even to spell this out seems tediously heavy-handed; it's enacted precisely so that it doesn't need to be said. Herein lies the true pleasure of these sweet, brief stories: they aren't novel, or even especially subtle—a child's discovery of death, or of his father's limitations, is the stuff of first fictions everywhere—but they are, indeed, deceptively simple, each incident or image meticulously selected and evoked so as to reverberate fully, each bringing us back to the discovery, bewilderment, and joy of childhood.

The distance is considerable from this early work—in which much is pre-saged but much, too, is yet to come—to *I Refuse*, Petterson's new novel; but this new book affords, if not a return, then at least a frisson of the first collection's buoyancy. More than in almost any of his other novels, there are here openings to exultation. This may seem ironic, in a book called *I Refuse*; but the refusals in the narrative, manifold and diverse, are positive assertions of the will to live. (The implicit refusal located beyond the book's open end—the refusal of one friend to let another go—allows for the possibility of the most upbeat ending of any of Petterson's books.)

Broadly, *I Refuse* has more in common with Petterson's twenty-first-century fiction than with his earliest books, structurally and thematically. It keeps us, as Tim Parks has suggested of Petterson's work in these pages, "spell-bound and anxious." Like Petterson's masterpiece, *Out Stealing Horses*, this novel, too, shifts between a tightly focused single day in the near present (September 2006) and remembered events over a number of years in the 1960s and early 1970s. Whereas *Out Stealing Horses* has a single protagonist, Trond Sander, whose childhood recollections are prompted by the realization that his current neighbor is the brother of his close childhood friend, in this novel the narrative divides (not quite equally) between two men, Jim and Tommy, who meet for the first time in decades in the early morning on a bridge outside Oslo, where Jim is fishing and Tommy driving by in his fine Mercedes.

Petterson then follows both men through their respective days, in which their paths all but converge again at a shopping mall, and may potentially cross again the next morning. In between, he weaves the stories of their close childhood friendship, and of its unraveling. Tommy's sister Siri is also given voice in several sections, rather like the third melody in a fugue; and her perspective further illuminates Jim's and Tommy's lives.

At its simplest, the novel's premise can be summarized by Jim's reflection and Tommy's comment in their initial encounter: "he was so important back then," Jim recalls, "We went through thick and thin"; and Tommy observes, awkwardly, "Isn't it strange.... The way things can turn out. The opposite." By which he means that he, Tommy Berggren, whose childhood saw violence, abandonment, and isolation, has emerged triumphant in his expensive car; while Jim, in his ancient reefer jacket, has lost all of his youthful charm

and élan. (Tommy's prosperity has not, however, made him superficially appealing: as Jim amusingly observes, "He was the same, and yet he looked like Jon Voight in *Enemy of the State*.")

In the 1960s, in their town of Mørk, almost a hundred miles from Oslo, Jim is the lad with prospects, strong in school, reflective and intellectual, from a stable, devoutly Christian home (although without a father), the sort of boy for whom "the old lady at the kiosk sat behind the window all dolled up and ready, with her make-up on, waiting for the good-looking Jim at the same time every week."

His friendship with Tommy Berggren is in some ways unlikely: for Tommy, in Mørk, nothing is easy. The eldest of four (his sister Siri is close to him in age; the twin girls are younger), he finds by the age of fourteen that his entire family has been dismantled. Tya Berggren, the kids' mother, abandons the family one night in 1964 when Tommy is twelve, leaving her children to contend on their own with their brutal father, a garbageman who "used his boots" on them. "I hated my father," Tommy recalls. "Everyone knew I hated my father."

One afternoon after suffering a beating, Tommy breaks his father's leg with a baseball bat. His father flees, leaving Tommy and Siri in charge of the household. Young Tommy and Jim discuss this act of violence, and it is Jim who absolves his friend: "Maybe I don't have a soul," Tommy worries. "Sure you do," Jim replies. "But then what you did wasn't terrible. It was something you had to do. I know you.... I am the most Christian of us, so I must know."

Before long, the Berggren children are separated by Social Services: the twins are taken in by neighbors across the road; Siri is sent to a strict family in a nearby town, who consider Tommy a bad influence; and Tommy goes to live with his one adult friend, Jonsen, who runs a local lumber mill. Jonsen proves his saving grace:

The way he talked to people and the language that he used was the same whether the person he spoke to was a child or a teenager or somebody well into his years. The difference didn't even interest him.

Tommy doesn't know that Jonsen was his mother's lover, and that he orchestrated her escape; but Jonsen is the friend and mentor who will support him, employ him when he drops out of school, and then give him the business, enabling Tommy to build success upon success, leading, over the years, to his life of wealth and comparative ease.

Jim's trajectory and his undoing hinge, apparently, on a nighttime skating expedition to Lake Aurtjern. The boys are eighteen, on the cusp of adulthood, and the night so beautiful that Jim, who has abandoned God for socialism, observes that "you could get religious for less." There is a near-mystical bliss about the evening: Jim, considering his friendship with Tommy, thinks,

He felt so happy, for what would the future have been without

Tommy, what would life have been, and they could talk in this way only because it was night and the light was different and they had their caps on....

But Jim worries, too, about whether he is good enough for their friendship: "Maybe it was more like you had to be worthy." As they are skating, the ice, with a great noise, seems to crack beneath them, and Jim, in his panic, pushes Tommy to the ground. The events of the evening, it's implied, will force Jim so profoundly to doubt his worthiness that eventually his sanity is shattered. Within months, gravely depressed, he is hospitalized following a suicide attempt.

The two men's recollections of the murky time that follows beautifully illustrate the uncertainty and subjectiv-



Edvard Munch: Avenue in the Snow, 1906

ity of memory, and the ways in which each of us constructs narrative differently. As readers, we will trust Tommy's version of events more than Jim's, for obvious reasons; but quite aside from Jim's woolly recollection, Petterson captures, too, the distinctness of their temperaments, the way in which Tommy, who would have the most to forgive, harbors no grudge; while Jim, whose imagined judgment by Tommy has plagued him, cannot in fact see his own actual fault. Petterson knows that, as Epictetus observed, it's not what happens but how you react to it that matters; but the event, the reaction, and the individual will eventually come to seem intractably conjoined.

Jim's fall into darkness has repercussions even thirty-five years later, in 2006, when he has been on indefinite leave from his post as a librarian for a year. His dreams are of death—"Deep down in his sleep he was going to die"—and his waking hardly better:

When he woke up he was still going to die. It was over. It was all over. From the kitchen table he had swept any future he might have into a bucket that he carried out and emptied by the hedge. His life was at half-mast. He barely reached his own hips. He dragged himself along on his knees, the cross was heavy and sharp against his shoulder. I'm so thirsty, he thought and they give me only vinegar to drink.

It is tempting to infer that Jim has been felled as much by his mother's imposed Christianity as by any weakness in his own nature: the implication, in the

novel, is of a willed and fruitless Christian masochism. Petterson, whose own sympathies appear to lie with left-wing politics inimical to religion, may have constructed Jim's trajectory thus either consciously or unconsciously. But then Petterson, like Jim-as-socialist, still carries unacknowledged Christian freight; because the novel's shimmering open end allows for a Road to Emmaus encounter, in which Tommy may serve as the unlikely Christ figure.

Tommy's day, after the two men meet on the bridge that September dawn, is far busier than Jim's: he goes places, and meets people. He recalls Jonsen's recent death: the old man says to him, "I hold life dearly.... I don't feel like it's over," simple words the agonizing resonance of which we all can appreciate. Jonsen then suggests, in passing and with beautiful futility, that he could simply refuse to die—"You could

refuse, of course." Tommy takes this up, almost like a chorus: "Of course you can refuse," and again, "Goddamnit, of course you can refuse." In this fighting spirit, when Tommy is unexpectedly called to retrieve his long-lost father from a police station up north, he is able both to go and to keep his distance; "No peace, I thought, nothing that binds us together. I refuse."

What this journey grants him is the summoning of his youth, and the certainty of his bond with Jim:

I felt like ringing Jim. He could have gone in with me.

We could carry that weight together. He knew what my father was like. How easy it was to think of Jim now. How difficult it had been, but when I saw him on the bridge and knew him at once despite the dark, the woollen cap, it came so suddenly I didn't have time to be anything but happy.

After contending with his dad, Tommy returns to Oslo, stopping for a bite at the same shopping mall in which Jim has recently visited the Social Security office. They dine in the same cafeteria a short time apart, and are unwittingly compared by the same cashier, a woman named Berit. She prompts in Tommy a life-affirming realization—"I could see her skin too, and it was as though I knew it from before and had touched it before, and it filled me with homesickness"—that will enable him to celebrate "her sensational, warm, living breath."

There is perhaps a degree of stylized contrivance to this novel—the organization of events on this extraordinary day in September 2006 is about as naturalistic as that of a Greek tragedy—and this structural control may initially seem at odds with Petterson's pared prose, which so strenuously eschews nicety and falsehood. But of course such narrative simplicity is hard won, a distillation, and inevitably an artifice of its own. In style and in structure, Petterson forges a form that, although it requires self-conscious machination, will then carry forward the organic progress of character and event. It's the novelistic equivalent of earthworks, undertaken to enable the river of time to flow more smoothly. And it's just possible that in this instance, for Tommy and Jim, it may not be cursed. □

*See his "Strange Love in the North," June 24, 2010.

Brazil: The Corruption of Progress

Kenneth Maxwell

Dilma Rousseff of the Workers' Party (PT) was narrowly reelected president of Brazil in the second round of the presidential election on October 26 last year. She won with 51.6 percent of the votes. Aécio Neves, her opponent from the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB), received 48.4 percent of the votes. The result revealed a country deeply split by region, class, wealth, and race. In the north and northeast, the poorer part of the country, Dilma, as she is called in Brazil, received over 60 percent of the vote. Yet in the more prosperous south, southeast, and center west, Aécio won.

In São Paulo State, where one fifth of the Brazilian population lives, and which represents one third of Brazil's economy, Aécio gained 64 percent of the votes to Dilma's 36 percent. But he lost his home state of Minas Gerais just north of São Paulo, which he represents as a senator, and where he had been governor for two terms. He is also the heir apparent to his maternal grandfather, Tancredo Neves, one of the great heroes of Brazilian democratization who was elected president by an electoral college after military rule came to an end in 1985. Neves represented for many the opposition to the military regime, but he died before he could assume office. While Aécio had represented the state for years, his cuts to public expenditures were unpopular. Losing Minas Gerais lost him the election.

It had been a very bitter presidential campaign. The candidacy of the socialist Marina Silva had posed a serious challenge to Dilma from the left. Like former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Marina was born into poverty. She was illiterate until her late teens, and went on to become an environmentalist and heir to the legacy of Chico Mendes, the forest rubber tapper and worker's party activist who was assassinated by ranchers in the western Amazonian town of Xapuri in 1988.

Marina had become the principal challenger to Dilma after Eduardo Campos, the socialist presidential candidate and the former governor of Pernambuco, died in a plane crash in Santos in August 2014. But Dilma attacked Marina, a Christian pentacostalist, with ferocity, accusing her of being an agent of the bankers, and of threatening to "take food off the tables" of the poor. It was untrue; but it worked. Marina was knocked out of the competition in the first round of the presidential elections. Yet the calculation that Marina's voters would then support Dilma proved inaccurate. The main beneficiary was in fact Aécio Neves.

Disenchantment with Dilma had been growing well before the presidential election. Mass demonstrations throughout the country before the World Cup took place in Brazil in 2014 had shaken her government. Millions took to the streets in every part of Brazil to protest the vast expenditures on World Cup facilities and the poor state of public services. Dilma's personal popularity, which had reached 79 percent in March 2013, fell by 13 percent. Soon 62 percent disapproved of her. The 2005 Mensalão scandal, in which leading members of the Workers' Party, in-

cluding Lula's chief of staff, José Dirceu, were convicted of vote-buying in Congress (the "Mensalão" or "big monthly payment" referred to the monthly bribes paid), also sapped confidence in the honesty of the PT, which was one of its great assets. Dirceu had helped Lula calm the fears of the business and financial communities in Brazil, and most importantly in New York and Washington. But he was convicted of buying the support of small political parties and spent time in jail. The "Mensalão" crisis came to a head during Dilma's first term and damaged the credibility of her

Renato Duque, Petrobras's director of engineering and services, was also arrested. Pablo Roberto Costa, the former head of Petrobras's refining unit, signed a leniency agreement with prosecutors in exchange for providing testimony. He accused scores of politicians of receiving bribes in exchange for winning contracts. On April 15, João Vaccari, the treasurer of the PT, was arrested and charged by the federal police with receiving payments from Petrobras suppliers.

The Petrobras scandal is not the only case of corruption unfolding in Brazil.



Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Russian President Vladimir Putin before the final match of the FIFA World Cup, Rio de Janeiro, July 2014

government. More importantly, it demonstrated that leading politicians could, and would, be convicted.

The lessons of the crisis were not learned, for a much larger scandal emerged soon afterward. It involved Brazil's largest state corporation, the oil company Petrobras, South America's largest enterprise and the pride of Brazilian nationalists. Founded by Getúlio Vargas in 1953, Petrobras held a legal monopoly of the oil industry until 1997. The Brazilian government now directly or indirectly owns 64 percent of what has become a vast multinational corporation, with assets in South and North America, Europe, Africa, and Asia. The repercussions of the Petrobras scandal are still unfolding, but unlike the Mensalão scandal, they are international in scope and in their consequences.

The scandal came to light as a result of Operation Lava Jato ("car wash"). Once again the principal part was taken by the federal police and public prosecutors, led by a small team of dedicated and tenacious investigators in Curitiba, where their activities are overseen by Federal Judge Sérgio Mota. They arrested leading businessmen from some of Brazil's largest construction companies for paying concealed bribes to Petrobras in order to be awarded contracts. Among those jailed were officials of the Camargo Corrêa, one of Brazil's biggest private conglomerates, as well as Alberto Youssef, who had worked as a money launderer. Youssef had been arrested nine times in the past, and had spent a year in prison.

There is Operation Zelotes, in which the federal police uncovered a scheme involving major corporations paying bribes to officials at the Administrative Council of Tax Appeals (CARF), in the Federal Revenue Service, to avoid taxes and penalties. The federal police claim that the scam involves major corporations, banks, and manufacturers, as well as Petrobras. On March 26 search-and-seizure warrants were carried out by the federal police and fiscal agents at forty-one locations, seventeen of them in São Paulo.

Finally there is the ongoing scandal involving offshore secret accounts held by Brazilians at the Swiss private bank HSBC in Geneva. The discovery of these accounts came from the "SwissLeaks" revelations of 100,000 secret accounts by Hervé Falciani, a former information technology consultant at HSBC. Brazilians held the fourth-largest number of foreign accounts at HSBC, and the largest number for Latin America. Not all these were illegal by any means. But many are believed to belong to Brazilians hiding money from the Brazilian tax authorities. HSBC paid 40 million Swiss francs (\$43 million) to the Geneva prosecutor in early June to settle the Swiss money-laundering investigation, but investigations of HSBC over tax evasion allegations continue in the US, France, Belgium, and Argentina, as well as in Brazil.

The "Clean Companies Act" anti-corruption law was passed by Dilma Rousseff in August 2013, and came into force in January 2014. It makes in-

dividuals and corporations liable and subject to punishment for corrupt practices. The penalties can be severe, up to 20 percent of the company's gross revenues over the previous year. But unlike the US, where the Department of Justice and the Securities and Exchange Commission (and in the UK the Serious Fraud Office) have centralized responsibility for prosecutions, in Brazil twenty-seven states and 5,570 municipalities can interpret the law. Lawyers are warning their clients that they could face numerous charges, especially in view of the corruption of some judges at the local and even the state levels.

Every Brazilian citizen is well aware of the chronic shakedowns of city contractors and street vendors, of violators of the complex zoning regulations, and of restaurants and bars by corrupt officials. There is even a phrase for the process. It is called the "custo Brasil," in other words, part of the "cost" of doing business in Brazil. A World Bank survey of 1,802 Brazilian firms found that almost 70 percent identified corruption as a major constraint. The Federation of Industries of São Paulo State (FIESP) reckons that the cost of corruption in Brazil is something on the order of \$32 to \$53 billion a year.

The consequences of the recent revelations are already beginning to be felt. Maria das Graças Foster, one of Dilma's closest friends and collaborators, has been forced to step down as CEO of Petrobras. In June, the heads of two major construction companies were arrested. But the reach of corruption in Brazil goes beyond the PT and is entirely bipartisan. In São Paulo, which has been governed by successive center-right Brazilian Social Democrat Party (PSDB) governments, the major party in opposition to the PT, scandals have been uncovered in the building and equipment purchases for the Metro and railroad systems, and again the international dimensions have made a cover-up difficult in Brazil.

The part of the Ministry of Justice responsible for investigating anti-trust cases said that eighteen companies were part of a cartel involving fifteen projects valued at \$4 billion in Brasília, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo between 1998 and 2013. This cartel was accused of prearranging offers tendered in the bidding process, and paying bribes to dozens of officials.

The overall result of these many scandals has been to weaken Dilma's presidency. But it has also opened up alternatives that are at least as bad or worse for Brazil. The question most Brazilians are asking is, Did Dilma know? Dilma Rousseff has an enviable history. She is from a middle-class family in Belo Horizonte (her father emigrated to Brazil from Bulgaria). She joined a far-left group as a student and was imprisoned for three years and tortured by the military regime. She then lived in Rio Grande do Sul, a large state to the north of Uruguay where she worked in state government, becoming a member of the PT in 2000. She served as minister of mines and energy in Lula's first administration, and was responsible for overseeing the immense (and environmentally damaging) dam

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projects in the Amazon basin (over which she had deep disagreements with Marina Silva, at the time Lula's minister of the environment). She was appointed Lula's chief of staff after José Dirceu's involvement in the Mensalão scandal and was Lula's choice as successor. She had also headed the board of directors of Petrobras between 2003 and 2010 until she was elected president. In view of her past role at Petrobras, and at the highest levels of Lula's government, for many Brazilians there seem to be only two alternatives. If she did not know about the corruption at Petrobras she is incompetent. If she did know she is culpable. Still, no official charges have been made against her. According to polls, 84 percent of Brazilians believe that she must have known.

Petrobras is not just any other company. It is the crown of Brazil's policy of "national champions," the large organizations that are expected to advance the interests of the nation in exchange for government support. But it has been hurt by factors other than political meddling and the kickback scandal, particularly the fall in the price of oil on international markets as a result of the rise of shale oil production in the US and Saudi Arabia's decision to maintain production levels in order to thwart American competition. The slowdown of the Chinese economy has also had a negative impact on Brazil, since China is Brazil's largest foreign trading partner. Brazil's GDP has fallen by 1.3 percent during 2015 and its commodity boom is over for the time being.

Dilma has also followed a more ideological foreign policy than either of her two predecessors. Fernando Henrique Cardoso was a well-known left-wing academic, and was one of the leading exponents of dependency theory. He was (and is) well respected in both Europe and the US, where he had been a visiting professor during his exile under the military government. He speaks English and French, and his research institute in São Paulo (CEBRAP) was supported by the Ford Foundation. Lula was also respected internationally. He had good relations with the international division of the AFL-CIO in the United States, who saw him as an anti-Communist union leader (which he was).

Lula developed a wide-ranging and active foreign policy as president, particularly in Africa, as well as (unsuccessfully) in the Middle East. But Dilma Rousseff has not had great success in foreign relations. She has, without gaining much for Brazil, favored the group of countries known as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), and she hosted the 2014 BRICS summit in Fortaleza where the new BRICS development bank was announced. Chinese prime minister Li Keqiang, visiting Brazil in May, did promise major Chinese investment in infrastructure projects, but many in Brazil remember the limited fulfillment of past Chinese promises.

Dilma's relationship with the US has been difficult. It was not helped by the revelation by Edward Snowden that her cell phone was being monitored by the National Security Agency (as was Angela Merkel's). As a result Dilma canceled her planned state visit in 2013 to Washington. Her foreign policy has been largely guided by Professor Marco Aurélio Garcia, Lula's old foreign pol-

icy adviser, who remained in his position after Dilma became president. Professor Garcia is one of the founders of the PT, and a longtime enthusiast for left-wing parties and movements in Latin America and the Caribbean; he has for years been a central figure in the São Paulo Forum where these leaders meet. Dilma, for her part, has not criticized the Russian seizure of the Crimea, and has avoided any critical comment on Nicolás Maduro's regime in Venezuela.

One result of such policies has been that many of the more liberal-minded members of the Brazilian establishment rallied around Aécio Neves's candidacy. He was by far the favorite choice of investors and bankers on Wall Street and in London. Arminio Fraga, who had previously worked with

in eliminating extreme poverty. This has been the result of a stabilized economy (in particular the taming of inflation) and economic growth, a major achievement of Cardoso's, as well as public policies that provided a basic minimal income to encourage parents to keep their children in school. The policy was initiated by Cardoso, but was expanded by Lula as the "Bolsa Família." The number of Brazilians living on the equivalent of less than \$2.50 a day fell from 10 percent to 4 percent between 2001 and 2013, and the income of 60 percent of Brazilians increased between 1990 and 2009, with 25 million Brazilians ceasing to live in extreme poverty.

But the distribution of income in Brazil remains highly unequal, especially among Brazilians of different



FIFA President Sepp Blatter, Dilma Rouseff, Angela Merkel, and German President Joachim Gauck (back row) watching Germany defeat Argentina in the World Cup final, Rio de Janeiro, July 2014

George Soros in New York, and was the central bank president under Cardoso, would have become minister of finance had Aécio won. Rubens Barbosa, the former ambassador in Washington, and the head of international affairs for FIESP, was slated to become the foreign minister. But the antagonism on the streets toward Dilma and Lula and his legacy has been palpable since the election, with large demonstrations against her in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Some of the demonstrations in the more prosperous parts of the country were accompanied by loud banging of pots and pans—recalling protests against Allende in Chile—and by demands that Dilma be impeached and the military intervene.

Behind the current impasse stands the ongoing antagonism between former presidents Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Lula, who have become the perennial grumpy old men of Brazilian politics, each unwilling to credit the other with any achievement. In fact, both were responsible in their different ways for much of Brazil's progress over the past two decades. They both have their political base in São Paulo, Brazil's most developed industrial and financial state. Both opposed the military regime. Both are democrats. They collaborated in the past, but then competed for influence and for power, Cardoso and his Brazilian Social Democratic Party from the center-right, Lula and his Workers' Party, with his strong base in the trade union movement, from the center-left. But their achievements are considerable and both men can, and should, claim credit.

Above all, as the World Bank recently reported, Brazil has been the world leader over the past two decades

economic and racial backgrounds. Brazil remains a country where the majority of the population is nonwhite, and where silent racism and poverty remain an obstacle to full citizenship. As a result of the downturn in the Brazilian economy, the number in extreme poverty rose again in 2013, though the statistics were not released by the government's Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA) until after the presidential election was over. But the government's social programs that help the poor, especially in the north and northeast, go a long way in explaining Dilma's victory and the continuing resilience of her support among the poorer nonwhite population in the marginal areas of the larger cities, and in the poorer regions of the countryside. This was Lula's great strength, and it continues to be Dilma's.

The problem facing those who wish to impeach Dilma is the question of who will succeed her. The line of succession runs through the vice-president to the head of the lower house of Congress, to the president of the Senate, to the head of the Supreme Court. The political paralysis of Dilma's presidency has certainly increased the power of the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB), which has been a permanent force in Brazil's political equation, always with its eyes firmly fixed on the uses of power and the spoils of office. It holds the central ground. The head of the Senate, Renan Calheiros, and the president of the lower chamber of deputies, Eduardo Cunha, as well as the vice-president, Michel Temer, who acts as an intermediary between the presidency and the Congress, are all from

the PMDB, which has been the permanent party in all government coalitions since democratization.

The PMDB threw its support to the right when it formed part of the parliamentary coalition that supported Cardoso for two terms; it then turned left to support Lula for two terms, and supported Dilma Rousseff in her first term, and then again in her reelection last November. Eduardo Cunha is from Rio de Janeiro, and is a neo-Pentacostal evangelical Christian. He is among the most conservative members of the Congress, opposed to gay marriage, abortion, and marijuana. An economist and radio presenter, he has been accused of involvement in numerous corruption scandals. Renan Calheiros is from Alagoas, and was president of the Senate from 2005 until 2007, when he was forced to renounce his position as a result of accusations of tax evasion and corruption. Calheiros was minister of justice during Cardoso's presidency. In 2007 *Veja* magazine accused him of accepting funds from a lobbyist to pay for the child support of a daughter from an extramarital affair. An investigation of his business dealings found income tax fraud, and a Senate disciplinary inquiry took place. But by secret ballot the Senate declined to impeach him. He stepped down as president of the Senate, but was elected president again in February 2013.

Vice President Temer, who is also president of the PMDB, is a lawyer of Lebanese origin from São Paulo. He has served three times as president of the chamber of deputies and is a constitutional scholar. The common view is that Temer, Cunha, and Calheiros prefer to

keep a severely weakened Dilma in the presidency rather than impeach her.

The Congress has only 11 percent public approval according to the most recent opinion polling from Datafolha. Both Calheiros and Cunha have taken to obstructing and stalling the austerity measures proposed by Dilma's new finance minister, Joaquim Levy, a graduate of the University of Chicago, to whom Dilma has, in effect, delegated economic policy making. But Levy is facing the sharpest downturn in the Brazilian economy in seventeen years, and the worst recession since 1990.

The PT's congress, held in the northeastern state of Bahia in June, found the party severely split. Many longtime PT militants worried that the government was playing with fire in its economic policy, and they are very hostile to Levy and his austerity policies, even though Dilma, who returned early from a trip to Europe to attend, assured them that the social programs for the poor would not be undermined.

Cunha and Calheiros have opposed Dilma's government appointees, and the newly emboldened Congress seeks to deprive Dilma of the right to appoint new judges to the Supreme Court and other higher courts. Members of Congress are also trying to severely limit the president's right to appoint officials to state enterprises without Senate confirmation. The Brazilian president has great power because of her right to make these appointments, as well as to appoint thousands of officials throughout the federal government including to the state corporations such as Petrobras, Eletrobras, the Banco do Brasil,

and BNDES (the Brazilian National Development Bank, which has a portfolio larger than the World Bank and is involved in many overseas financing operations).

Meanwhile many workers, especially in the oil sector and in Rio de Janeiro, where Petrobras has its headquarters, have been laid off, as credit dries up and construction projects are put on hold. The cynics already believe the politicians will look after one another, and the big construction companies are too big to fail. They are needed to build the stadiums for the Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games next year. Petrobras will survive the crisis. When the company's new CEO, Aldemir Bendine, released the first Petrobras audited financial statements, they showed that the value of the company had decreased by \$17 billion because of losses from the recent scandal, but it is still worth over \$55 billion. (In 2008 it was worth \$300 billion.)

Brazilians are not at all surprised by any of this. But if the Petrobras scandal was not enough, now there is the growing scandal at FIFA, particularly troubling to a country where soccer is so popular.* At the end of May, fourteen top soccer officials from eleven countries were indicted, with seven of them arrested in Zurich, on charges of racketeering, wire fraud, and money-laundering following an FBI investigation into corruption in the organization.

*For a longer discussion of the FIFA scandal, see the Web version of this article at www.nybooks.com.

They had, for example, accepted bribes from companies that wanted to sponsor teams or broadcast games. Several Brazilians were implicated in the scandal, including José Maria Marin, president of the Brazilian Football Confederation from 2012 until April 2015, and a former governor of São Paulo. His successor, Marco Polo del Nero, left Zurich precipitously the next day to return to Brazil.

Brazilian soccer officials had been accused of corruption before. Newspapers had alleged that Ricardo Teixeira, Marin's predecessor, had taken £8.4 million in kickbacks for the sale of broadcasting rights for the 2002 and 2006 World Cups. But since the payments were made in the 1990s, before it issued ethics rules, FIFA said that it would not take action against him.

The new revelations of FIFA's behavior, however, show that corruption may be even more pervasive than previously thought. The scandal extends to Brazilian business. According to the US Department of Justice, José Hawilla, founder of the sports marketing company Traffic Group, paid \$60 million in bribes to South American FIFA officials involving sponsorship of teams and television rights.

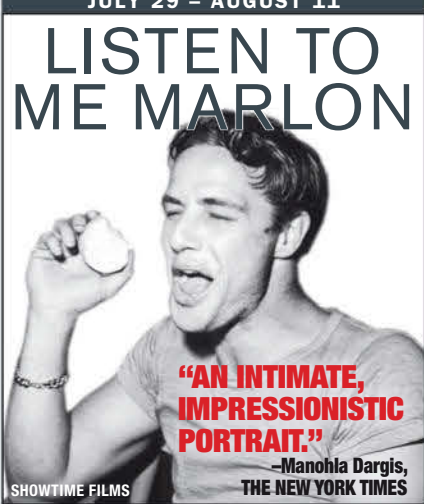
Dilma has said about the FIFA scandal, "I do not think the problem is here," adding that "Brazil is not just any old country. We do not need to pay anyone to host the most lucrative Cup." But she also had said that the Petrobras scandal was the result of the actions of a small number of corrupt officials. She was quite wrong. The clouds of corruption continue to hang heavily over Brazil. □

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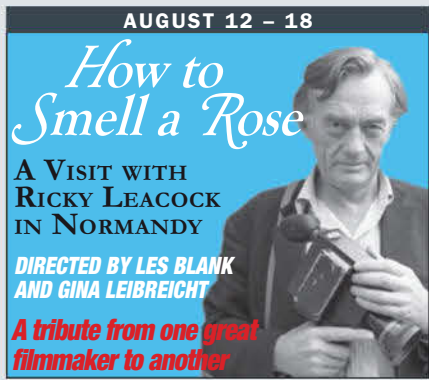
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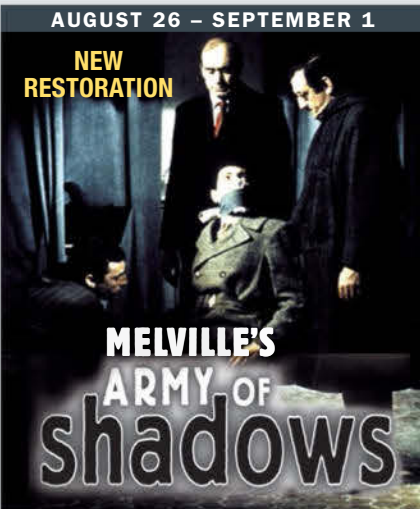
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Robert Darnton

The prospect of new leadership at the Library of Congress—after the recent resignation of its longtime director—opens up great possibilities for democratizing access to culture. America has led the world in making digital communication part of everyday life, yet it has lagged behind other countries in making the holdings of its greatest library available online and free of charge. A new regime at the Library of Congress (LOC) could digitize its collections and link them with collections in other libraries, archives, and museums so that everyone has access to the resources that are everyone's heritage.

Until now, digital development has taken place primarily in the private sector. While corporations such as Google were dominating the Internet, the public interest in the digital realm was left to private initiative. The Digital Public Library of America, based in Boston, has begun to link the collections of research libraries in a national network, which now makes ten million items available free of charge to everyone with access to the Internet. The Internet Archive, with headquarters in San Francisco, performs a similar service by harvesting texts from millions of websites as well as books. HathiTrust, located in Ann Arbor, Michigan, preserves the texts of 13.4 million volumes, largely from collections that were digitized by Google. (Google's own database cannot be made available as a commercial digital library, owing to a decision of a federal district court, which declared Google Book Search illegal in 2010.)

Each of these initiatives provides valuable services. Although they overlap in places, they should be maintained—and above all, they should be integrated in a single system so that everyone has access to all of the country's cultural resources. The Library of Congress is the richest resource of all. As it is supported by public funds, the public should be able to tap its collections—160 million items, of which 37.8 million are books and other print materials—by means of the Internet.

Easier said than done. But other countries have done it, at least on a small scale. National libraries throughout Scandinavia have developed systems to make all of their collections available to all of their citizens, under various restrictions. They favor “extended collective licensing” agreements, backed by legislation, which make it possible for Scandinavians to access copyrighted material without the assent of every owner of a copyright. Associations of authors and publishers agree to the establishment of a fund and a collecting agency, which provides payments to the rights holders according to a formula such as a fixed fee for every viewing of a page. Thanks to an arrangement of this sort worked out between the Norwegian National Library and a collecting society called Kopinor, Norwegians can read online nearly all the books that were ever published in their language.



The reading room at the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

The National Library of Australia operates a successful online system called Trove, which connects users with libraries scattered across the country. Australians click onto Trove and then follow the links that it provides, gaining access to 18.5 million books and theses, 155 million articles and reports, and 7.8 million photographs and other images. They cannot download the material covered by copyright, but they can borrow it by interlibrary loan. The National Library therefore functions as an aggregator—that is, a provider of catalog-type information (metadata), which integrates all of Australia's resources into a single system. It is also digitizing its own collections, including most of Australia's newspapers.

The National Diet Library of Japan, which is similar to the Library of Congress, began digitizing its collections in 2009 after a revision of Japan's copyright law. Most of them are now available from its website, although books protected by copyright can be consulted only from computers located within the library itself.

South Korea has adopted a similar policy, designed to create an “Information Technology Nation.” Its national library began digitizing material in 1998,

and eleven years later it completed the construction of a “National Digital Library,” which makes its holdings accessible online, except for copyrighted works, which must be read on site.

Having made a large proportion of its historical collections available through a digital repository called Gallica, the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) is now digitizing works from the twentieth century, including many that are covered by copyright. True, it did not see much of the \$1.1 billion that President Nicolas Sarkozy pledged in 2009 to make the country's cultural heritage accessible online. But legislation passed on March 1, 2012, empowered it to create a freely accessible database from copyrighted works that were published before January 1, 2001, and that are no longer being commercially distributed.

The rights owners will be compensated for ten years by a collective management organization representing authors and publishers. They can opt out of the arrangement, and they may sign up with Google for the sale of their out-of-print works; so it is not yet clear how the French will have access to twentieth-century literature. But the BnF is committed to accessibility,

and it has also developed a solution to the problem of orphan works—books under copyrights of which the owners have not been identified. The BnF will post the titles of such books from its collections; and if no claimant comes forward within ten years, it will digitize the texts and make them available free of charge.

Publishers in Britain are required by law to provide a free copy of every book they publish to the British Library and five other “deposit libraries.” Since April 2013, that requirement covers a great deal of digital material, including websites, blogs, and electronic journals. Legal constraints mean that access to copyrighted texts is restricted to computers within the library. Only one person at a time can consult the text of an e-book, and that person cannot print out more than one of its chapters or more than 5 percent of an article in a journal. Still, the British Library is committed to defending the public interest in the digital sphere: “Our mission,” it says, “is to make our intellectual heritage accessible to everyone.”

The Library of Congress has the same mission. But while other great libraries were leading the way into the digital future, it failed to manage its own information technology, to say nothing of developing a national network of electronic resources. How can the new librarian, who will assume office on January 1, 2016, achieve this goal?

Although it provides services to members of Congress, the Library of Congress is above all a national library. It is the only deposit library in the country, and it should acquire and preserve everything of importance that is published in the United States, “published” being taken in its original sense of “making public,” whatever the form, content, or medium may be.

Digital documents are more fragile than texts printed on paper, because the minute ones and zeros of which they are composed easily unravel; and even if they resist damage such as “link rot,” they can get lost in cyberspace. Without up-to-date identifying descriptions (“metadata”), they might as well not exist. The danger of disappearing into electronic clouds is compounded by inconsistencies in the metadata furnished by every institution with a digital repository. Metadata must be adapted, or “scrubbed,” so that the material they identify can be linked in a seamless system of systems. The Library of Congress should set metadata standards and promote interoperability on a national scale; and while fostering advanced technology in the US, it should promote innovations that are compatible with the systems of other countries. It should collaborate with Europeana, an aggregator funded by the European Union, which links together databases scattered throughout twenty-eight countries in Europe.

Does this standardizing function mean that the Library of Congress

Dick Durrance II/National Geographic Creative

would crush other libraries with its sheer size and weight? Not at all. Not any more than its earlier cataloging service compromised the independence of other institutions. The Library of Congress should facilitate, not dominate the activities of libraries outside of Washington. Instead of operating from the top down, the national network should function horizontally. The Digital Public Library of America has demonstrated the effectiveness of a horizontal or distributed system. It has no database of its own, and it employs only thirteen staff members in its headquarters, but soon it will have “service hubs” in every state. Highly trained professionals in these hubs help public libraries develop their own digital resources.

Librarians in small towns and urban neighborhoods invite local citizens to bring in photograph albums, letters, and family papers of all kinds. Under guidance from the hub’s experts, they scan this material, provide it with metadata, and preserve it. The collection grows organically, stimulating the community’s consciousness of its culture and history, and it is integrated into the national network of the DPLA. Public libraries are the most vital and most trusted institution in many communities. They could be empowered, not overpowered, by help of this kind from the Library of Congress.

What sets the Library of Congress apart from every other library is the size of its collections, the largest in the world. They should be digitized. That, too, raises all kinds of difficulties, which, however, could be eliminated by congressional action and could at least be minimized by careful study, including research on the extent of duplication among the collections of the LOC, HathiTrust, and Google’s database. Perhaps Google could be persuaded to donate copies of its files or to digitize everything in the LOC, while correcting the imperfections of its earlier work. But any partnership between a government body devoted to the public welfare and a private corporation dedicated to maximizing profits is likely to run into trouble. (Google’s arrangements to digitize collections in the Bavarian State Library and the Municipal Library of Lyon have aroused some fierce criticism.)

With adequate funding, the work could be done by the LOC itself or by the Internet Archive, a nonprofit organization with extensive experience in mass digitizing. Brewster Kahle, the founding director of the Internet Archive, says that he digitizes at 10 cents a page or \$30 for an ordinary book and that he could get the cost down to 6 cents a page if he were to take on a very large library. At the higher rate, it would be possible to digitize all the books in the LOC for \$1.1 billion or about \$100 million a year for ten years. That is an enormous sum, but to put it

in perspective one should consider that South Korea paid \$108 million a year for seven years to build its National Digital Library. And one should remember that the appropriation for the LOC in fiscal 2016 was \$631 million and that the Defense Department’s budget request for fiscal 2015 came to \$575 billion (including \$79 billion for Overseas Contingency Operations).

It would be naive to expect Congress to finance such a project. Funding for the LOC has been cut by 8 percent since 2010, but a coalition of foundations could provide \$100 million a year, and the benefit to the public would be incalculable—access to everything in the world’s greatest library, instant information for all sorts of enterprises, and endless educational uses, especially if the material were to be accompanied by pedagogical packages and user-friendly data sets.

Whether the LOC digitized its own collections or coordinated access to those in other research libraries, it could not make available books, photographs, music, films, or anything else covered by copyright. Copyright now extends automatically to everything published after 1964, to many books published between 1923 and 1964, and even to some works that appeared as long ago as 1879. It therefore would be impossible for a fully digitized Library of Congress to make available most of the literature from the twentieth century—that is, most of its holdings. How could it cope with this problem?

The new administration of the LOC could learn from the experience of national libraries in other countries, especially in Scandinavia, where authors and publishers cooperate for their own benefit as well as that of the public. Most books, especially in the field of light fiction, rarely produce revenue after a year. Once their royalties have ceased, most authors have one remaining desire: to reach readers. I myself published a book in 1968 that brings in enough for me to take my wife out to dinner once every five years—if she pays her half of the check. With the agreement of my publisher, I have turned over the use of its copyright to an organization called Authors Alliance, which will make it available online and free of charge through a Creative Commons license. The vast majority of authors would gladly enter into an arrangement of this kind in order to give their books new life after they cease to produce any income.

Given its influence at the summit of the world of books, the Library of Congress could organize such a program. It could be entirely voluntary, or it could take the form of an extended collective licensing agreement with an opt-out provision for authors and publishers who prefer to remain attached to the marketplace. The new regime could create a moving wall so that every book, except those of the

opt-outs, would fall into the public domain after ten years. Funding could be provided by modest pay-per-view fees, but it would be preferable to make the entire corpus available free of charge. An open-access system could include a mechanism for payments to authors and publishers according to the rate of accessing the texts—that is, reading them on a screen—without downloading and printing them.

This system would require legislation that would codify a tendency that already exists in case law. Drawing on the principle of fair use, courts sometimes favor the diffusion of texts by noncommercial organizations for the benefit of the public, provided that private interests do not suffer any “market damage.” Music, photographs, and videos pose special problems; and books no longer really go out of print, since their texts are preserved in digital files, and they can be physically reproduced by the technology of print on demand.

The legal constraints on publishing are endlessly complex, and lawyers will find countless reasons to oppose innovation; but the pettifoggery should be subordinate to the principles established by the Constitution in Article 1, Section 8, Clause 8, which gives Congress the power “to promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries.” The original copyright act of 1790, passed “for the encouragement of learning,” set the time limit at fourteen years, renewable once. The copyright act of 1998 extended the limit to the life of the author plus seventy

years—effectively, more than a century. We need to revise current copyright law.

That may be impossible, considering the power of lobbies, especially those of Hollywood. But if the Library of Congress, which includes the Copyright Office, cannot lead the way to alleviating copyright restrictions, it can help solve the vexed problem of orphan works. There are now hundreds of thousands of books that continue to be copyrighted while the current holders of the copyright are unknown. The LOC could establish a register of every book in its collection that, after due diligence, appears to be an orphan. It could publish the list of titles on its website. If anyone presents a valid claim to the rights of a book, it should remove that work from the list. And if no claimants appear within ten years, it should digitize all the books and make them available to the public from an open-access repository. The new librarian of Congress should create the repository, recruit the best experts to maintain it while developing other digital initiatives, and eventually fill it with the entire collection of the nation’s greatest library.

The repository of the LOC would then serve as the heart of a digital circulatory system that would energize the entire country. That prospect may raise so many difficulties that it looks utopian. But the founders of our country combined utopianism with a strong strain of pragmatism. By making the most of twenty-first-century technology, the Library of Congress could tap the tradition of the founders and realign itself with its original principles. □

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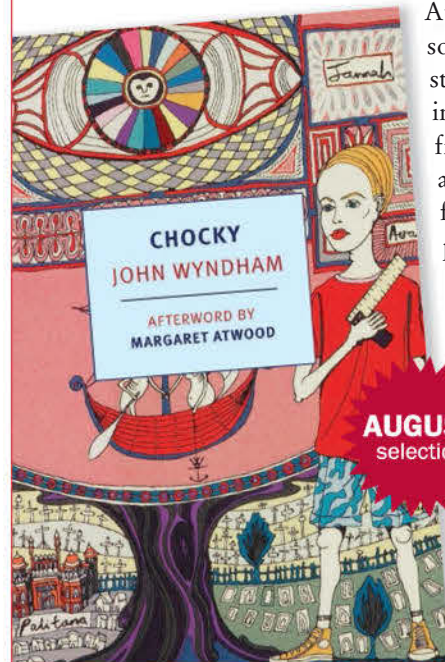
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Summer Schedule

The next issue of **The New York Review**, dated September 24, will go on sale September 10. Subscribers should receive their issues approximately one week before the on-sale date.

When Europe Failed

Christopher R. Browning

Europe on Trial: The Story of Collaboration, Resistance, and Retribution During World War II

by István Deák.

Westview, 257 pp., \$30.00 (paper)

In the United States, World War II is generally remembered as the last “good war,” particularly in comparison to the dashed expectations and disillusionment following World War I and the domestic division and sense of futility accompanying the Vietnam and Iraq wars. World War II as a “good war” did not mean there were no serious moral issues related to how the war was fought, such as the shameful internment of Japanese-Americans or the firebombing and then nuclear annihilation of Japanese cities, which aimed directly at breaking the Japanese will to continue the war through targeting noncombatants.

The idea of a “good war” means that the US was at war with unquestionable aggressors—Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan—and thus there was no ambiguity about “justice of war” in this case. Even more, in view of Nazi atrocities and war aims and the ferocity of Japanese occupation in the places it conquered, it mattered desperately that the aggressors not win, and there was no question that the Allies achieved total victory. But in Europe, the experiences, memories, and legacies of World War II were much more complicated and quite different. As István Deák demonstrates in his new book, *World War II placed “Europe on trial,”* and in his considered judgment “Europe did badly.”

Deák examines the European experience of World War II through three prisms or sets of categorizations. The first concerns the different periods of the war, which he divides into three phases: September 1939–June 1941 (unchecked Nazi expansion); June 1941–February 1943 (from the German attack on the USSR, called Barbarossa, to Stalingrad); and from early 1943 to the postwar period (the slow process and consequences of Nazi retreat and defeat). The most prominent feature of the first phase was, in Deák’s opinion, the failure of many European countries to take any meaningful measures to defend themselves. The resources of the nations of Western and Northern Europe, combined with military mobilization and diplomatic coordination, could have deterred or defeated Hitler. However, most countries made inadequate military preparations for the looming war and failed to make common cause with others in the face of a common Nazi threat. In Deák’s harsh verdict, they preferred “ruin, foreign occupation, and national humiliation.”

The result (and this is Deák’s second prism) was that by June 1941, all the countries of continental Europe could be placed into one of three categories: those defeated and occupied by Germany, those allied with Germany, and those that maintained neutrality through economic relations beneficial

to Germany. But Deák is also clear that this categorization by diplomatic status did not necessarily reflect military, political, and economic reality. Some of the occupied countries, like France with its “model” collaboration government, and some of the neutral countries, like Sweden with its indispensable supply of iron ore for the German war economy, were much more important and useful to Hitler than some of his allies, which, like Italy, all too often turned out to be liabilities rather than assets.

While Deák excoriates the defeated and occupied countries for the unre-

reabsorbed into victorious Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia respectively.

If Deák is almost uniformly critical of the leadership of the defeated and German-allied countries of Europe, he is much more sympathetic with the people who bore the burden of their leaders’ ill-fated choices. For them, living on a continent under Nazi hegemony presented a stark spectrum of choices, which is Deák’s third set of categories: passive accommodation, active collaboration, resistance, and—at war’s end—different forms of retribu-



German soldiers shaking hands with French volunteers bound for the front, July 1944

paredness and defeatism that led to their own ruin, he is no kinder in his verdict on Germany’s allies, among them Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Croatia. He insists repeatedly that they had far greater latitude of choice on crucial issues than is usually acknowledged. They were, he argues, “to a large extent, masters of their own fates.” They chose to curry favor with and ally themselves with Nazi Germany; they chose (with the exception of Bulgaria) to join Hitler’s war against the Soviet Union; and they chose to facilitate and participate in the Final Solution.

They did so for their own selfish purposes, the most important of which were territorial aggrandizement and the ethnic cleansing of disliked minorities, as well as shared antidemocratic, anti-Communist, and anti-Semitic beliefs. But their cynical calculations were, of course, predicated on the assumption of Nazi victory and permanent hegemony over the Continent.

For Hitler’s allies, Deák adds a second division into periods. Up to Stalingrad, they curried favor with Hitler. Thereafter, they began to put out peace feelers to the Allies. And finally, they tried to change sides, with mixed results—Finland, Romania, and Bulgaria successfully, Italy and Hungary not so. Only the puppet states totally dependent on Germany for their separate existence—Slovakia and Croatia—remained loyal to the end, before being

tion. Deák defines passive accommodation as simply trying to get by and survive. He sees collaboration as voluntarily working with the Germans out of shared ideology or goals or in order to realize one’s own agenda.

Deák understands that these categories were malleable and not mutually exclusive. A Czech or Dane who simply went to work in a factory or shipyard every day to get by was in fact producing resources for the German war economy. A French policeman who rounded up Jews and turned them over to the Germans in 1942 could turn a blind eye or even warn Jews of imminent arrest in 1943 and join the resisters at “five minutes before midnight” in 1944 by shooting at defeated and retreating Germans. A Polish member of the “Blue Police” could both aid the underground resistance to the Germans and simultaneously help Germans guard ghettos and track down escaped Jews; the Polish underground he aided could simultaneously attack Germans and kill fleeing Jews who tried to share the forest in which they were hiding.

In 1941 a Ukrainian prisoner of war could accept the offer to serve the Germans as the only alternative to starvation—in Lawrence Langer’s memorable term a “choiceless choice.” But then he could help the Germans kill Jews in 1942, desert with his entire unit to the forest, and assault his Polish neighbors while trying to create an ethnically homogeneous independent

Ukraine in 1943. He could die fighting the returning Red Army in 1944–1945 or even thereafter. In short, individual self-interest and beliefs as well as ethnic and nationalist agendas, in shifting and confusing ways, often cut across the larger ideological struggle between democracy, fascism, and communism.

The ideological aspects of the war intensified when Hitler broke his non-aggression pact with Stalin and invaded the Soviet Union. Volunteers from every country in Europe joined the “crusade” against Bolshevism (for instance, 15,000 Norwegians bore arms for Germany), and otherwise neutral Spain sent an en-

tire army corps. To ensure that English and American readers do not become too smug in the self-satisfaction that they would have behaved more nobly than their Continental counterparts in the same circumstances, Deák devotes a few pages to the Channel Islands, where German troops were disciplined and friendly (fathering some nine hundred German-British children), and cooperative local administrators prepared a list of inhabitants who were of fully or partly Jewish origin and then handed them over to the Gestapo with lethal consequences.

Out of this morass, Deák makes several other salient points. First, World War II was for Europeans both “two wars” and “wars within the war.” The “two wars” were the relatively conventional war in Western Europe where Germany had only limited war aims on the one hand and, on the other, the savage war of racial imperialism and colonial conquest waged by Nazi Germany in Eastern Europe. The “wars within the war” were the ideological and often ethnic civil wars that broke out within so many European countries. In general, the more fiercely the civil war raged, the less avoidable was the option of passive accommodation for individuals. And nowhere were these “civil and ethnic wars” more ferocious than in dismembered Yugoslavia.

Here I am reminded of the story of my sister-in-law’s uncle, who as a civil engineer worked in the Belgrade municipal government under the collaborating Milan Nedić regime in Serbia in order to help rebuild the damaged city while he simultaneously gave assistance to victims of the German occupation. For his service under the Nedić regime, the postwar Tito government tried and convicted him. Because many witnesses testified to the help he had given them and others, his sentence was mitigated so that he served only two years in prison. He concluded that he had “won” his “personal war against both Hitler and Stalin,” but many others did not survive the struggle for personal autonomy in a highly polarizing civil war.

A second salient point in Deák’s portrayal of Europe’s World War II experience was the ubiquity of ethnic cleansing, carried out not only by Germany but also by its allies and collaborators during the war and by the victors

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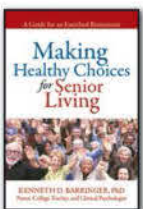
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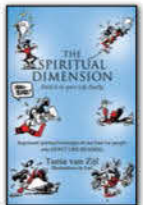
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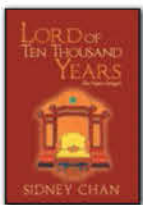
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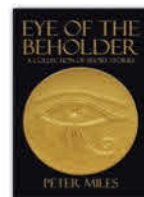
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Patricia C. Greene shares poetry that explores today's most topical issues on faith and life. These poems will uplift our spirit and awaken our soul. It promises to make readers smile and tear up while encouraging them to grow in faith.

after the war. World War II provided the opportunity for virtually every state to increase ethnic homogeneity by ridding itself of unwanted minorities. In Eastern Europe virtually all the ethnic Germans either fled or were expelled at the end of the war. Deák estimates that some 13 million people left. What he does not say, however, is that it was Hitler and Himmler who inaugurated the uprooting and destruction of the ethnic German communities in Eastern Europe, beginning in 1939. As part of the Hitler-Stalin pact, the ethnic Germans in the lands allotted to the Soviet Union (the Baltic States, Volhynia, and Bessarabia) were to be “repatriated” and “resettled” in the territories of western Poland annexed to the Third Reich. Here they would be awarded the farms, businesses, and homes of Poles and Jews, who in turn were expelled eastward in a vast demographic shift.

The other prominent minority that disappeared from Eastern Europe was of course the Jews, and here the Nazis had many collaborating perpetrators. Bulgaria, often praised for saving its own Jews and not joining the Barbarossa campaign, willingly rounded up over 11,000 Jews from the Greek and Yugoslav territories of Thrace and Macedonia that Hitler had awarded them, and these Jews were promptly shipped to Treblinka and gassed. Ion Antonescu’s Romania joined the Barbarossa campaign and together with the Germans killed over 300,000 Jews in the territories of Northern Bukovina, Bessarabia, and Transnistria and the city of Odessa that Romania thereby gained. But like Bulgaria it did not deport the Jews of “old Romania.” In Croatia the Ustasha slaughtered most of the local Jews (if they had failed to reach the safety of the Italian security zone) and sent only a fraction to Auschwitz. The Hungarian gendarmerie provided the manpower to deport 435,000 Jews to Auschwitz, and Arrow Cross thugs killed thousands more in Budapest after the deportations stopped. The collaborating Vichy regime in France passed its own extensive anti-Jewish legislation, and the French police provided both the lists and manpower for the subsequent roundups. And everywhere in Europe, hidden Jews faced the constant threat of denunciation.

Jews and Germans were not, of course, the only victims of the epidemic of ethnic cleansing and racial killing. As Deák shows, the Croatian Ustasha killed and expelled many more Serbs than Jews. The Ukrainian militias, armed and trained by the Germans to kill Jews, then turned on the Polish minority in their midst as well. Ultimately Poland and Ukraine, more than other countries, were transformed from multiethnic to ethnically homogeneous territories. After the Czechs and Slovaks “divorced” in 1993, it became clear that their current ethnic homogeneities are also a legacy of World War II.

The last major theme of Deák’s book is retribution, which took many forms. In Western Europe, there was a focus on women collaborators that was absent further east. Women accused of “horizontal collaboration” were subjected to the ritual humiliation of being marched through the streets with their heads shaven. In Norway, some 30,000 people, the totally innocent offspring

of Norwegian women and Germans soldiers, were denied Norwegian citizenship and doomed to lifelong status as pariahs. Vigilante killings and summary executions were prominent in France and Italy—about 10,000 in each country—where resistance fighters and others had scores to settle. In Eastern Europe retribution and purges “were closely combined with ethnic cleansing and class warfare.” In Hungary, for instance, “of the 300,000 [people] punished after the war, about two-thirds were ethnic Germans.” Taken together, Deák concludes, “judicial retribution and political purges...amounted to one of the greatest social and demographic upheavals in history.”

Many of the judicial proceedings were highly flawed. They were distorted by the forces of victors’ justice,



A ceremony marking a gift of guns from Hitler to Serbia’s collaborationist regime, Belgrade, June 1939

ideological and political agendas, the hypocrisy of Stalin’s own criminal regime, and emerging cold war tensions. So, Deák writes, “it is a miracle that justice was served at all. Yet,” he concludes, “justice was indeed served.” While Deák is critical of various aspects of postwar judicial proceedings, two of them, in my view, merit deeper examination.

First, in a subsection entitled “Justice and Injustice at Nuremberg,” he notes that while Germans were convicted of taking and killing hostages, the American Military Tribunal at Nuremberg in the case of the so-called Balkan generals—i.e. Nazi officers in Yugoslavia and Greece—neither outlawed the killing of hostages nor specified what numbers would have been permissible. It should be noted that killing hostages, as still declared legal at Nuremberg, had nothing to do with actual German practice. In its verdict the court ruled that international law imposes four conditions on an occupying power concerning the taking and possible killing of hostages. First, it must establish “effective” occupation before it can hold hostages as a deterrent to attack. Second, the hostages must be people with some logical connection to the attackers who are to be deterred. Third, the identity of the hostages who will be killed in case of attack must be made public. And fourth, the number of hostages killed must stand in some reasonable relationship to the number of casualties suffered.

The Germans, however, did not establish effective occupation over conquered and dismembered Yugoslavia.

Instead they immediately transferred their frontline units to the eastern front and hoped to pacify Serbia with three undermanned, underequipped, and overaged Austrian divisions. When these units proved no match for Tito’s partisan uprising, the Germans, rather than bring in reinforcements, adopted ever more radical policies of revenge and deterrence that they themselves called “expiation measures” (*Sühnemassnahmen*). For every German killed, they rounded up and shot one hundred Serbs found in the vicinity regardless of their lack of any connection to the attackers. In one case this included the entire student body of a high school in Kragujevac.

The goal openly announced by the commanding general was for the Germans to be “avengers” creating an “in-

timidating example...which must hit the whole population most severely.” When this policy had the counterproductive result of causing young Serb men to flee to the partisans, the German army switched instead to shooting (still on the 100–1 ratio) interned Jewish and Gypsy men, that is, precisely those who could not possibly have been involved in the attacks because they had been under guard in German camps.

This was not hostage killing in any sense of international law; this was the indiscriminate slaughter of noncombatants first by using terror as deterrence and then as racial mass murder. The policy reached the apex of absurdist tragedy when Austrian soldiers shot all the males in a refugee internment camp filled with Austrian Jews as “expiation” for Serbian partisan attacks on the German army.¹ Whatever flaws there may have been at Nuremberg, convicting the German generals responsible for these atrocities was not one of them.

Deák correctly notes that Allied zeal for trials waned as the cold war became more intense, and the Adenauer regime showed no interest in Germany trying its own in the 1950s. It was only the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem, he claims, that inspired new proceedings, such as the trial of Auschwitz officials in Frankfurt between 1963 and 1965.

¹See Christopher R. Browning, *Fateful Months: Essays on the Emergence of the Final Solution* (Holmes and Meier, 1985), pp. 39–56.

This is not quite the case. Indeed, during the 1950s there were, as he writes, only scattered trials. However, aside from following up accusations resulting from random encounters between victims and perpetrators, in which case they invariably did the minimum rather than the maximum, German prosecutors had neither the interest nor adequate information to identify, try, and convict the Nazi criminals in their midst.

This changed decisively not with the Eichmann trial in 1961, but with the Ulm trial of the Tilsit Kommando in 1958, when a local prosecuting attorney, backed by the minister of justice in Württemberg, decided to do the maximum rather than the minimum. Faced with investigating a single man accused of committing crimes as a member of the Tilsit Kommando, the prosecutor created an investigative team that carried out research on the Holocaust in Lithuania, located witnesses and suspects, and finally indicted, tried, and convicted ten members of that killing unit.

This model—a proactive policy of proceeding from the historical investigation of the crime to the identification and location of individual suspects against whom sufficient evidence had been found and charges could be brought—then became the basis for the founding of the Central Agency of the State Administrations of Justice for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes, with its headquarters in Ludwigsburg near Stuttgart. This unit had already begun investigating and preparing hundreds of further cases even as the Eichmann trial was getting underway.²

German prosecutors would still face immense obstacles in the form of the total inadequacy of the German criminal code in dealing with crimes of this magnitude and nature and the continued presence of unsympathetic judges of dubious background on the bench. Many cases were dismissed on specious technicalities if they were not outright miscarriages of justice, and many convictions resulted in ludicrously light sentences. Nevertheless, some trials did result in convictions with the maximum allowable sentence of life in prison. Moreover, a dedicated group of German prosecutors and investigators compiled an extraordinary amount of evidence in the Ludwigsburg archive that will remain a major resource for historians in the years to come.

István Deák takes the reader on a sweeping survey of some of the bleakest aspects of a bleak period in European history. He dispenses with comforting national myths and unexamined assumptions of national virtue. World War II was, he writes, “one of the greatest tragedies that humans ever brought upon themselves,” in which “compassion and good will were two qualities in short supply”—a verdict that is amply illustrated by the many evocative, insightful, and distressing examples of human behavior that fill his book. All the more does he appreciate the remarkable transformation that has subsequently led to “a new, unified, and better Europe.” □

²See Patrick Tobin, “Crossroads at Ulm: Postwar West Germany and the 1958 Ulm *Einsatzkommando* Trial,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2013.

The Most Influential Invention

Tim Parks

White Magic: The Age of Paper by Lothar Müller, translated from the German by Jessica Spengler. Polity, 311 pp., \$25.00

In his 1964 essay “Civilized Man,” lamenting the growing standardization of culture across the globe, the Romanian-French writer Emil Cioran first reassures readers he is not proposing protection for the world’s dwindling numbers of cannibals, but he then steps up to defend “illiterates” who are being “tyrannized,” he claims, “with a virulence that is quite unjustified.” “Is it an evil,” Cioran asks, “not to know how to read and write? In all frankness I cannot think so. Rather I believe that when the last illiterate has vanished from the earth, we can go in mourning for man.”

Lothar Müller’s book *White Magic* is a study of the invention that more than any other made possible the universal drive for literacy and standardization: paper. And as Müller shows, from the earliest times, every advance in the technologies for producing paper and covering it with words, signs, and images always brought with it the fear that what had been created might prove more a monster than a convenience. “The evils that paper caused in various phases of the [French] Revolution,” wrote Louis-Sébastien Mercier, describing the vast increase in newspaper publication in revolutionary Paris, “are such that one might wish it had never been invented.”

In the nineteenth century, Carlyle, Dickens, and Balzac all saw civilization sinking under the weight of a vast overproduction of paper and the bureaucracy and journalism that went with it. Melville feared the very whiteness and blankness of modern, mass-produced paper in much the same way he feared the whiteness of the whale. The mind’s appetite for a space it can fill, our apparent inability to resist the invitation of the empty page, determine a process that finally leads to the electronic screen I am typing into now, a writing space that is both the apotheosis and the overcoming of the paper page. It is impossible to tell the story of civilization without it.

The tale begins innocently enough in China with pulped mulberry plants spread on cotton stretched across a wooden frame. Built up in layers, the pulp hardened into sheets that could, among other uses, be written on. Exactly who originally had this idea we do not know, but in 105 AD a court official persuaded the Chinese emperor to adopt paper on a large scale for public records. It was cheaper than parchment, which was made from animal skins. Used for a variety of purposes—windows, lanterns, artificial flowers, fans, umbrellas, packaging—the invention travelled west along the trade routes, notably the Silk Road, until by the ninth century the Arabs were producing paper that was cheap enough to replace the hitherto dominant pa-

pyrus, a paper-like product made by gluing together strips of material from the papyrus plant, then smoothing the resulting surface for writing. It was “an early example,” Müller remarks, “of the pattern underlying paper’s rise to prominence. Paper stepped in as a substitute in established economic and cultural functions and then stimulated further demand for itself by proving its capabilities.” This capacity “to stimulate further demand” is one of the most remarkable aspects of paper’s history.

At this point much of the demand for paper came from government admin-

right up until the late nineteenth century in a process of recycling that linked the textile and paper trades, created work for considerable numbers of rag gatherers and rag washers, and located paper production in the big cities near the product’s main clients. It also led to a perception of paper as a territory of metamorphosis, a pure white product produced from filthy old clothes on which, or with which, new things could be created. “Through hard work, old rags/Are given new life, beautiful and white,” begins a German poem from the seventeenth century:

necessity of shifting coin from place to place. Traveling with paper in one form or another became the norm. Pilgrims would record the stations of their pilgrimage on large sheets of thick paper they then used to cover themselves at night. Some believed paper had magically protective powers. Jews considered everything written in Hebrew characters to be sacred regardless of its content, so huge quantities of paper were preserved simply because it was not permitted to throw away anything on which Hebrew was written. Thus the past began to demand a new space in the present, the virtual a place in the real.

With more and more uses for writing encouraging a growing literacy, written literature began to assert itself over the oral tradition. Throughout *White Magic*, Müller, who is best known as the literary editor of the *Süd-deutsche Zeitung*, parallels his technical and social history of paper’s development with extensive reflections on its role in literary production. *The Arabian Nights*, he notes, a written text about tales told orally by a woman who had learned them from books, is full of references to paper and writing, both of which frequently have positive and even miraculous qualities. A man turned into a monkey by an evil spirit is able to save himself by demonstrating his ability to write, and what he writes is “a hymn to pen and ink, the progeny of Allah which make it possible for people to extend the chain of transmission beyond the bounds of death.”

The first European paper mills were established in Italy in the early thirteenth century, and Arabic technique was now transformed and accelerated by the mechanization Europeans had achieved in the textile and metalworking industries. The mills polluted the rivers they drew on to soak the rags and caused a stench with the boiled-down animal remains used for sizing—the process of smoothing the paper’s surface so it could be written on.

Each mill was a considerable investment risk, but no matter how much paper was produced it seemed a use could always be found for it. This was the century of Italy’s first merchant banking boom and the growth of a business community whose members would be recognized by their inky fingers as they learned to control their trading empires at a distance through the medium of paper and to give a new and rigorous account of their dealings in the double-entry ledger. In the meantime, Renaissance interest in the classical past led to a huge increase in the copying of old manuscripts. Soon enough European mills were exporting to the Middle East, provoking a long decline in Arabic paper production.

Behind all the facts and technical processes, the quality of the rags, the size of the paper sheets, the color and texture of different surfaces and how they were achieved, what Müller chiefly gives us is a sense of a collective human vocation for creating a world apart on



Abelardo Morell: Two Open Books: Ellen Ternan and Charles Dickens, 2000

*Shall you remain contemptible,
my heart?*

*Emerge from the old state of sin,
New and pure, that God’s hand
May write His will on thee.*

Aside, then, from the many other uses to which paper was put and which Müller never allows us to forget—toilet paper was already being produced in the 700s—it soon became possible to write down far more than had ever been written before. Unlimited copies of the Koran could be made. The Islamic empire of the 700s and 800s could translate into Arabic and copy all of Greek science and philosophy. Messages could be sent that didn’t rely on a messenger’s good memory; indeed, the messenger could be kept from knowing the content of the message. Secrecy was easier. More and more people began keeping records of the past, getting used to the idea that information and ideas could be stored outside the head, creating an impression of continuity of identity across time.

On the more immediately practical level, handwriting could be used to establish a person’s identity, a fact that introduced the possibility of using paper to guarantee credit. Soon enough a merchant’s letter could become a check, allowing payment without the dangerous

Abelardo Morell/Edwynn Houk Gallery, New York

paper, a parallel existence that complicates this world as a room can be complicated by hanging mirrors on the walls. It could be a mercantile, legal, or bureaucratic world impinging directly on reality, or a fictional world, or a devotional space, or again a space to play in.

The fourteenth century saw the rapid rise of the playing card, made from pasting slips of paper together, stamping them with a woodcut design, and coloring them, in much the same way that devotional images of saints were colored. For many people this would have been their first contact with paper that had to be “read.” And often a literate person with paper, pen, and ink would be required to create an IOU when card gamblers lost more than they could pay. The gambling craze was accompanied, needless to say, “by card game bans enacted by cities out of a fear that their citizens would be unable to pay their taxes.”

For those in government, paper brought a growing awareness of the power that comes with information. Philip II of Spain, who ruled from 1556 to 1598, won himself the nickname of the *rey papelero*, the paper king, for his determined use of paper in every aspect of his administration. Officials were regularly asked to fill in questionnaires and forms so that decisions could be based on all relevant information. Subjects were to appeal to him not in person but through petitions, sparing him the danger of making decisions on the spot and allowing him to administer justice without traveling at all. When Philip did grant audiences, he would invariably appear with a daunting sheaf of papers in his hands whose contents the petitioner could not know. “Even in the world of Philip II,” Müller remarks,

paper—in its dual role as a bearer of secrets and barrier to physical access to the sovereign—had a hand in shifting the center of power to the sphere of invisibility which would influence the modernization of administration in the early modern state.

As Müller considers the transformation brought about in paper production and writing habits with the arrival of the printing press in the fifteenth century, he enters into a debate with Marshall McLuhan and other media historians. Or rather, he takes issue with any account of the history of paper and print that seeks to turn it into a polemic, demonizing or sanctifying this or that development while insisting, as McLuhan tends to, on “dramatic epochal ruptures.” What most attracts Müller in his version of the story is the evidence of an underlying continuity and gathering web of complications, the onward march of paper making us constantly aware of a grid of polarities in human values—oral/visual, durable/ephemeral, popular/elitist—such that every move in one direction is matched by a countermove in the other.

In *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, McLuhan had seen print as marking a decisive shift from oral to visual mediums of communication, the rigidly parallel lines of the printed word, with its impersonal letters and standardized spelling, subjecting Western culture to a tyranny of linearity that would not be

broken until the age of the computer. He (rather unwisely, one feels) drew on Rabelais and his hymn to the mysterious pantagruelion, a miracle plant and universal medicine, as evidence of the age’s enthusiasm for typesetting and belief that print offered a cultural panacea.

Müller, who has read widely and carefully, has little difficulty in suggesting how much more elusive, playful, and profound Rabelais’s miracle substance is. More interestingly, he shows that, far from taking over paper communication entirely, print developed side by side with handwritten texts of one kind or another for many centuries. In this regard one need only think of the armies of scribes employed right up to the time of Melville’s *Bartleby*, or again the huge amounts of handwritten correspondence and schoolwork produced until just a few decades ago. At the same time, the impersonal and “finalized” printed page created a new interest in the personal, handwritten manuscript that lay behind it. The anonymous printed book thus called into being the autograph hunter, and ultimately the author archive.

Then there was the post office. “It is hard to overstate the importance of the connection between paper and the postal system,” Müller observes. Going back to the regular courier services of the late Middle Ages, he suggests how the periodical arrival of paper messages allowed time to be divided into regular segments and communications to establish a certain rhythm. In eighteenth-century London, where some areas boasted twelve postal deliveries a day, it made possible a constant flow of handwritten correspondence that combined the immediacy of conversation with the self-reflectiveness of the person who writes alone, something Samuel Richardson and Pierre Choderlos de Laclos would exploit to give the epistolary novel a new psychological depth. Very often Richardson’s *Clarissa*, and also Madame de Tourvel in *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, write letters to people they see and speak to every day, because on paper they can say things they would not dare say to another’s face.

In turn the recipient can read such letters in private without blushing. Paper makes this possible. Müller doesn’t develop this line of thought, but arguably one of the great contributions of written communication, especially in fiction, was the scope it gave for saying things that could not or would not be spoken out loud. In general, for a certain class of people, intimacy was becoming more and more a mental experience to be elaborated on paper. And just as it would soon be alarmingly difficult to establish what hard wealth lay behind paper money, so it could be extremely difficult to understand what importance to attach to a billet-doux.

Like all good stories, this one speeds up. Toward the middle of *White Magic*,

as Müller considers Cervantes’s sparring with the imitator who told apocryphal tales of his Don Quixote and reflecting on how “a book’s success could threaten the author’s control over that book,” there is still a certain leisureliness to his account. Likewise in his discussion of the role of writing materials in Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* and Grimmelshausen’s *Simplicius Simplicissimus*, both featuring characters marooned on desert islands in desperate need of pen and paper. Even the description of the madly complex etiquette of letter writing, in which seemingly endless different sizes, colors, and qualities of paper were used for different recipients, retains something quaint about it. But as Müller starts to

Meanwhile, there were no longer enough rags, and in the late eighteenth century paper manufacturers finally figured out how to use wood pulp to step up production yet again, something that immediately gave an added value to the older and more durable kinds of paper whose production was largely suspended. All the same, with the supply of paper now assured into the twentieth century and writing and copying speeded up with the advent of the typewriter, sooner or later a crisis of storage space was inevitable. It came in the 1960s when telephone connections allowed for instant stock transactions around the globe, all of which were still being recorded on growing mountains of paper. At this point computers and electronic data storage could not come soon enough.

Müller is as balanced and intelligent about the relationship between electronic text and paper text as he is about that between manuscript and print. Paper is presented throughout the book as a precursor of the screen-based page rather than its antagonist or enemy, and we are reminded of all the ways paper and computers continue to interact. Once again, the material displaced is seen in a new light and treated with greater respect; suddenly, Müller points out, we have become aware that paper has a smell, and that we always were, and still are, attached to it.

Putting down the English version of this excellent book, mindful of Jessica Spengler’s fine and no doubt taxing translation, it is hard not to feel how important and determining it is that its author is German. Müller could never be accused of forgetting the Anglophone

world. He is always aware of the moments when Britain and America were central players in his story; he looks at Benjamin Franklin’s advocacy of paper money and William Gaddis’s criticism of the same centuries later. But he is never Anglocentric. Chinese, Arabic, French, Spanish, Italian, and Dutch contributions are all there.

Above all, and quite apart from Gutenberg, German involvement in the history of paper and print was huge, so it’s good to have detailed accounts of German paper mills and postal systems and refreshing to hear of German authors one did not know, Grimmelshausen in particular. Indeed, part of the evenness of Müller’s attitude to his material seems related to his having a range of reference so broad and deep as to preclude any shrillness, alarmism, or nostalgia. Rather than harnessing facts for a polemic, he is clearly fascinated by the way the shift to electronic media confirms a vocation for the verbal and virtual, rather than annihilating a specifically paper-based culture. That said, even those like myself who are happy with e-books will be grateful to Müller’s publishers for printing *White Magic* on good, thick, creamy paper and including, at the end, a dozen blank pages, all of which I have covered with untidy, handwritten notes, to make this mechanical mass-produced artifact intimately my own. □



Abelardo Morell: Curiouser and Curiouser, 1998

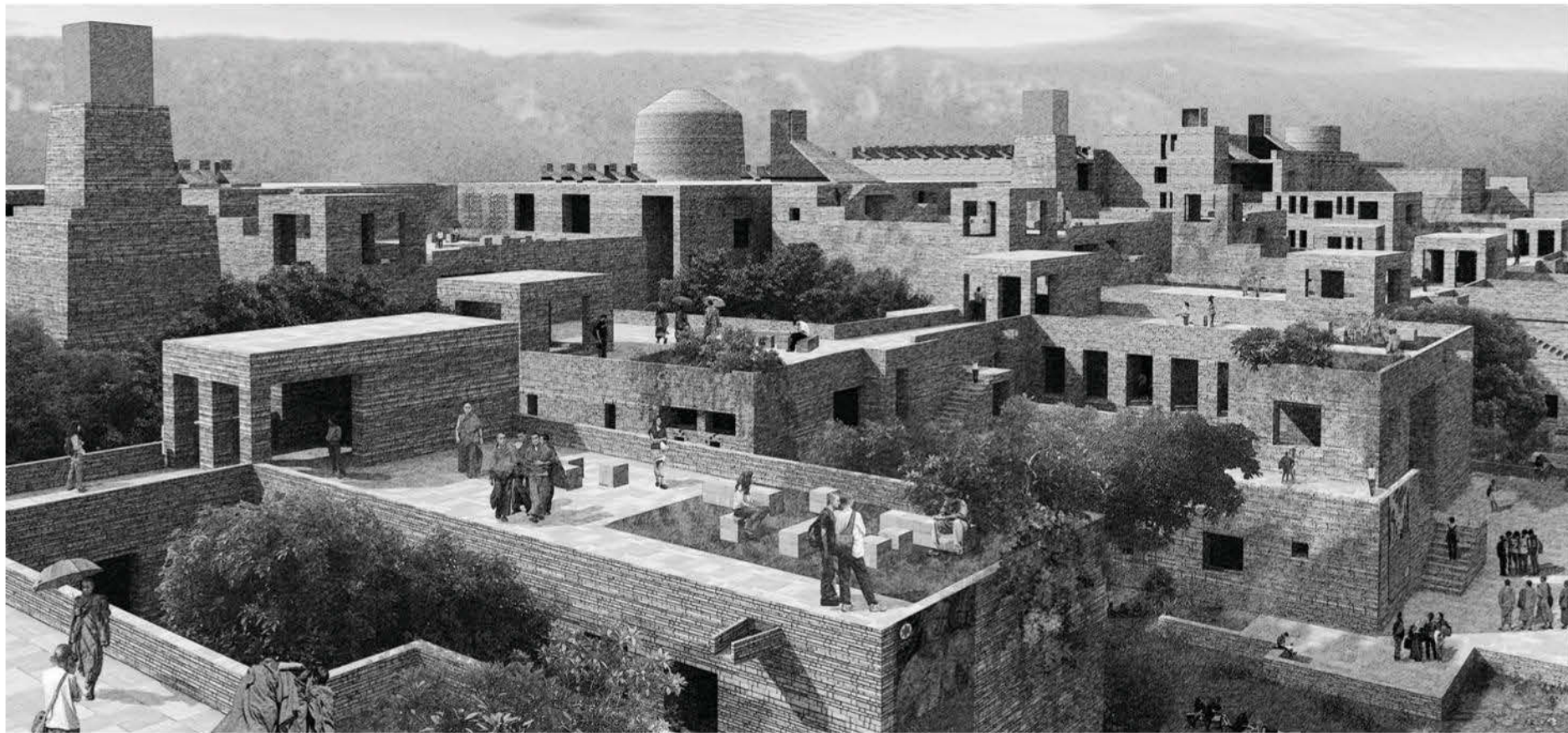
trace the growth of newspaper journalism and the progress in paper and print mechanization that made it possible, it’s hard not to feel that something is accelerating out of control. From now on, as Nietzsche remarked, there would be “an obligation upon everyone to read his newspaper at breakfast,” written of course by “the ‘journalist,’ the paper slave of the day.”

Goethe, Dickens, Balzac, Zola, and Melville are all called upon to analyze the new obsession for the topical and the search for a constant supply of news to fill pages that were now turned out nonstop from huge cylinders in endless sheets. Not to mention the drive to create a literate public to pay for them. Unsurprisingly, the proliferation of newsprint led to a horror of triviality, superficiality, ephemera; a material that had allowed for ever more elaborate mental constructs and made possible a more coherent vision of individual identity was now favoring an avalanche of mechanized mindlessness. From Carlyle through to Joyce, Müller illustrates the tension between daily journalism and more noble literary and philosophical aspirations, *Ulysses* being understood as a work that constantly digests the ephemeral newspaper world of Leopold Bloom to transform it into the more lasting monumentality of the literature Stephen Dedalus aspires to write.

Abelardo Morell/Edwynn Houk Gallery, New York

India: The Stormy Revival of an International University

Amartya Sen



Vastu Shilpa Consultants

A rendering of the new campus of Nalanda University, to be built in the town of Rajgir, Bihar, India, a few miles away from the original university, which was founded in the early fifth century and destroyed in the 1190s

1.

Classes began in early September last year at a small new international university, called Nalanda, in Bihar in northeast India—one of the most backward parts of the country. Only two faculties—history, and environment and ecology—were holding classes for fewer than twenty students. And yet the opening of Nalanda was the subject of headlines in all the major newspapers in India and received attention across the world. “Ritorno a Nalanda” was the headline in *Corriere della Sera*.

The new venture is meant to be a revival of Nalanda Mahavihara, the oldest university in the world, which began in the early fifth century. By the time the first European university was established in Bologna in 1088, Nalanda had been providing higher education to thousands of students from Asian countries for more than six hundred years.

The original university at Nalanda was run by a Buddhist foundation in what was then the prosperous region of Bihar—the original center of Buddhist religion, culture, and enlightenment. Its capital was Pataliputra (now called Patna), which also served, beginning in the third century BC, as the capital of the early all-India empires for more than a thousand years. Nalanda drew students not only from all over India, but also from China, Japan, Korea, Sumatra, and other Asian lands with Buddhist connections, and a few from elsewhere, including Turkey. It was the only institution of higher learning outside China to which any Chinese in the ancient world ever went for education.

By the seventh century Nalanda had ten thousand students, receiving instruction not only in Buddhist philosophy and religious practice, but also in

a variety of secular subjects, including languages and literatures, astronomy and other sciences, architecture and sculpture, as well as medicine and public health.

As an institution of higher learning, where the entry qualifications were high, Nalanda was supported by a network of other educational organizations that provided information about Nalanda and also helped to prepare students for studying there. Among the Chinese students was the well-known Yi Jing (635–713 AD), who studied in Nalanda for ten years, and wrote what was perhaps the first comparative study of different medical systems, comparing Chinese and Indian medical practices. Before coming to India, he went first to Sumatra (then the base of the Buddhist Srivijaya empire and now a part of Indonesia) to learn Sanskrit. By the seventh century, there were four other universities in Bihar drawing on Buddhism, all largely inspired by Nalanda. They worked in collaboration, though by the tenth century one of them—Vikramshila—emerged as a serious competitor to Nalanda in higher education.

After more than seven hundred years of successful teaching, Nalanda was destroyed in the 1190s by invading armies from West Asia, which also demolished the other universities in Bihar. The first attack, it is widely believed, was led by the ruthless Turkic conqueror Bakhtiyar Khilji, whose armies devastated many cities and settlements in North India. All the teachers and monks in Nalanda were killed and much of the campus was razed to the ground. Special care was taken to demolish the beautiful statues of Buddha and other Buddhist figures that were spread across the campus. The library—a nine-story building containing thousands of man-

uscripts—is reputed to have burned for three days. The destruction of Nalanda took place between the establishment of Oxford in 1167 and the founding of Cambridge in 1209.

2.

A proposal to revive Nalanda as a modern international university, though originating in India (particularly in Bihar), has been a pan-Asian initiative from the beginning. The idea was endorsed by all of the sixteen governments that attended the so-called East Asia Summit in January 2007, meeting in Cebu in the Philippines. They represented mostly Asian countries, including (in addition to India) China, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, but also Australia and New Zealand.

The aim of the founders of the new Nalanda was not only to have a first-rate university but to encourage cooperation and interchange of ideas across national borders (again, reflecting the traditions of the ancient Nalanda). They endorsed a “vision” of a new university that would be “open to currents of thought and practice from around the globe.”

Following the summit decision, the project to reestablish Nalanda was led by a “mentor group,” formally appointed by India but with members drawn also from other Asian countries. Distinguished intellectuals, serving as members, come from India as well as China (Wang Bangwei), Japan (Susumu Nakanishi), Singapore (Wang Gungwu and George Yeo), and Thailand (Prapod Assavavirulhakam). The university was established by an act of the Indian Parliament in 2010, and fol-

lowing that, the mentor group became the governing board of the revived Nalanda University. I have until recently been serving as chair of the board and chancellor of the new university.

The funds for rebuilding Nalanda have come mostly from the government of India, which made a further financial commitment in January 2014 to meet the basic costs until 2021. However, the citizens and governments of a number of other countries have also made contributions, including China, Australia, Singapore, Thailand, and Laos. All the land for the university has been donated by the government of Bihar, which is also assisting with ground and other facilities.

The reestablished Nalanda University will eventually have its new campus in the ancient town of Rajgir, a few miles away from the old Nalanda. The design and planning of the new campus, by the well-known architectural firm Vastu Shilpa Consultants (chosen by an international competition), are now completed, and the work of construction is about to begin. Since even the first phase of the work will take a few years, Nalanda has started functioning, on a small scale, in rented premises in Rajgir, under the incisive leadership of the vice-chancellor, Dr. Gopa Sabharwal, and the dean of academic planning, Dr. Anjana Sharma.

Most of the first students at Nalanda have come from India, but there are some from other Asian countries as well (Japan and Bhutan in particular), and the teachers have been recruited not just from India, but also from the United States, Germany, and South Korea. In addition to classes now being taught in history, environmental studies, and ecology, plans are being made for teaching economics and development

studies, public health, and Buddhist philosophy and comparative religions. Eventually, Nalanda will offer courses in international relations, linguistics, and literature, as well as information science and technology.

In my visits to the campus, I have been impressed by the quality of teaching and discussion among the faculty and students. In view of the deep skepticism that many critics had earlier expressed about the possibility of having a successful international university in a remote and backward part of India, there is something very reassuring about what has been achieved, and about the academic climate that has already become palpable.

3.

“Ritorno a Nalanda” was a remarkable and hopeful moment. But relations have become troubled between the newly elected government of India and the governing board of Nalanda University. The previous coalition government, with the National Congress Party as its dominant partner, initiated the revival of Nalanda University in collaboration with the government of Bihar and the East Asia Summit. When the national government lost the general elections in the spring of 2014, it was replaced by members of a very different political alignment, with a new prime minister, Narendra Modi, of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)—a part of the powerful Hindutva movement, which is dedicated to promoting India’s Hindu traditions, with Modi himself supporting not only Hindutva but also the goals of private business.

At the time of the general elections, I saw it my duty, as a citizen of India, to argue publicly against Modi’s sectarian political leadership, which posed a threat to India’s long-standing commitment to secularism. While critical of some features of the Congress-led coalition government (particularly its growing inefficiency and corruption), I strongly feared that minorities, particularly Muslims as well as Christians, would be insecure under Modi’s rule. This fear was based partly on his long history as a member—and a public advocate (or *pracharak*)—of the Hindu right-wing movement called Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

The fear was also based on the history of communal violence in Gujarat when Modi was chief minister of the state. More than a thousand people, mostly Muslims, perished in the riots there in 2002. Modi had a good reputation as an economic administrator in Gujarat but he failed to take effective action to protect non-Hindus from attack. My worries, I am afraid, have not been dispelled (despite verbal reassurances from Modi). Under the new regime, there have been sporadic occurrences of church burning and the concerted efforts of Hindutva activists to encourage conversion of non-Hindus to Hinduism, called *ghar wapsi* (“returning home”).

I was, therefore, not entirely surprised to find that the new government opposed my continuing as chancellor of Nalanda University. However, the larger issue concerns the academic independence of institutions of higher learning. The new government and its allies have been active in trying to impose their own views on many aca-

democratic institutions, and Nalanda’s academic independence has been under considerable threat over the last year. Many of the statutes concerning the governance of Nalanda that were passed by the board (as it was authorized to do) have not been acted on or even presented by the government to the Visitor of the University—the president of India—for endorsement. (All such statutes require formal government approval before they become effective.) The government tried suddenly, without any consultation with the governing board, to make radical changes in the board’s membership—a move that did not work because the proposed changes violated provisions of the Nalanda University Act passed by the Indian Parliament in 2010.



George Yeo, Singapore’s foreign minister at the time, and Amartya Sen at a meeting about the reestablishment of Nalanda University, New Delhi, August 2010

The government has also tried, much more successfully, to remove me as chancellor, overruling the unanimous decision of Nalanda’s governing board that I should continue—a decision arrived at in the board’s meeting in January chaired by George Yeo, the former foreign minister of Singapore. While I appreciated the unanimous support, it soon became clear to me that the tension between the government and the governing board of Nalanda over my continuing as chancellor was proving to be a barrier to the work of rebuilding the school. It also became obvious that the government’s hostility would prevent me from being an effective leader. I told the board that, under the circumstances, I will not accept reappointment when my present term comes to an end in mid-July of this year.

In fact, I strongly believe that it should not be difficult to find a very distinguished candidate who understands the vision that lies behind Nalanda’s revival and appreciates what Nalanda has to offer to contemporary higher education in India and elsewhere. It is, however, extremely important to make sure that the academic independence of Nalanda under the new chancellor is respected. The university must not be subject to partisan political pressure.

The central issue goes well beyond the headline of a well-researched recent report in the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*: “Il Nobel e il Premier: Sen contro Modi.” While it is certainly true that the Modi government is not pleased with the political positions I have taken, the confrontation is ultimately not about personalities. It is

about the principles governing public institutions, particularly the importance of academic independence.

4.

Unfortunately, the government’s pressures on Nalanda are part of a general pattern of interference in academic leadership across the country. For example, in January of this year, Dr. Sandip Trivedi, a widely respected physicist, was appointed the director of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR)—perhaps the most prestigious scientific institution in India—by a selection committee chaired by one of India’s most well-known scientists, C. N. R. Rao. But the institute was told by the

directors and chairmen of the institutes themselves.

It is hard not to conclude that the government has difficulty in appreciating the distinction between (1) an autonomous institution supported by the government, using state resources, and (2) an institution under the direct command of the government currently in office. For many hundreds of years universities in Europe have been helped to become academically excellent by governments that respect their autonomy. The British protect academic independence with much care in their own country even though the British rulers of colonial India very often violated the independence of public academic institutions. The government of India seems to prefer the colonial model.

This is, of course, not the first time that a ruling Indian government has interfered in academic matters. The record of noninterference of the previous Congress government was far from impeccable. And yet the extent of intervention has become both unprecedented and often politically extreme under the present regime.¹

The newly appointed head of the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), Yellapragada Sudershan Rao, is perhaps more well known for his Hindutva-oriented opinions than for any historical research he has done. For example, in his paper “Indian Caste System: A Reappraisal,” Rao praises the caste system, which—we are told—is often “misrepresented as an exploitative system.” Rao’s strong links with the group called Akhil Bharatiya Itihas Sankalan Yojana (ABISY), which is known as the “history wing” of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, has been a source of concern in the academic community, especially after four ABISY activists were appointed to the council of the ICHR. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, a leading historian and the chief editor of the official journal of ICHR (the *Indian Historical Review*), resigned in protest against the transformation of the ICHR.

The new head of the Indian Council of Cultural Relations, Dr. Lokesh Chandra, appointed by the Modi government, has informed *The Indian Express* that “from a practical point of view [Modi] supersedes the Mahatma [Gandhi].” Chandra has also expressed the view that Modi is, in fact, “a rein-

¹The interferences have sometimes been accompanied by the planting of false reports, typically through public statements by Hindutva leaders (or by journalists friendly to Hindutva). An example of the crudeness of the attack can be seen in the much-publicized public statement of a prominent BJP leader that the Nalanda chancellor is “paid an annual salary of Rs. 50 lakhs” (\$80,000) rather than no salary at all, or that “so far about Rs. 3000 crores,” or about \$484 million, have already been spent by Nalanda University. In fact, rather less than 2 percent of that sum (Rs. 46 crores, or \$7.42 million) has been expended altogether, including construction costs, from the beginning of the university until the end of the last fiscal year (2014–2015).

On misinformation put out to the media by the government itself, see the news interview with Professor Sugata Bose, a member of the Nalanda governing board (and also a member of Indian Parliament), published in *The Telegraph*, Kolkata, April 1, 2015.

carnation of God.” Chandra has said he believes that six million Koreans trace their ancestry back to an Indian princess from Ayodhya.

In view of the general record of the Modi government it was not particularly surprising that the government chose to interfere in the governance of Nalanda. But the confrontations between the governing board and the government, and the removal of the chancellor, got unusual public attention, with wide coverage in the press and editorial criticism of the government in several papers. These reactions have certainly helped to have a restraining effect on the government, unlike the case of many other academic institutions. The widespread public attention and questioning have, in effect, helped the minister of external affairs, Sushama Swaraj, to seek a solution that would be publicly defensible—rather than insisting on the unilateral extremism that characterizes many of the academic interventions by the Modi government.

The presence of intellectuals from other Asian countries on the governing board of Nalanda has also helped to protect the university from the government’s sectarian pressures. The board, which I continued to chair until July, decided in early May to name three non-Indian Asian members of the board, putting George Yeo of Singapore at the top of the list, as possible chancellor with Wang Bangwei of China and Susumu Nakanishi of Japan as reserves. Yeo has just accepted the position with the assurance that he will have the independence that will be required for running the university. Given his commitment to the principles of Nalanda, in addition to his vast knowledge of Asian traditions and remarkable intellectual and administrative skills, his appointment is a very good outcome.² It will remain extremely important, however, for the government to give Yeo the independence he will need to make Nalanda an academic success.

5.

When the old Nalanda began functioning in the fifth century, there was no other university in the world. There are now 687 universities in India—and others are being established. Why do we need one more? What makes Nalanda so special?

The history of education at the old Nalanda, which inspires the teachers and students of the reestablished Nalanda, remains powerfully relevant here. The tradition of Nalanda insisted on high educational standards, which are certainly important in India today where there is a conspicuous lack of official commitment to improving the quality of education. But it is also important now to follow the Nalanda tradition of global cooperation, a systematic attempt to learn across the barriers of regions and countries. What the Asian Civilizations Museum in Singapore called “the Nalanda trail” in its remarkable exhibition during 2007–2008 (when the proposal to restart Na-

landa University was being planned) emphasized the spread of knowledge and understanding from one country to another across Asia, driven by intellectual curiosity and interest rather than the pursuit of material profit.

The pedagogy that prevailed in the old Nalanda is strongly relevant here. The school regularly arranged debates between people—teachers, students, and visitors—who held different points of view. The method of teaching included arguments between teachers and students. Indeed, as one of Nalanda’s most distinguished Chinese students, Xuan Zang (602–664 AD) noted, education in Nalanda was not primarily offered through the “bestowing” of knowledge by lecturers, but through extensive debates—between students and teachers and among the students themselves—on all the subjects that were taught.

I have been impressed to find that the emphasis on debate is already strong in the pedagogy of the new Nalanda, not just on the topics in the syllabus, but also on more general subjects. For example, when I visited Nalanda last October—a month after classes started there—we discussed the respective roles of “the Silk Route” and “the Nalanda trail” in the development of intercountry connections. There has been much historical discussion of the trading links between Asia and Europe, and particularly the Silk Road linking China with regions in the West. Originally established between the third century BC and the third century AD, during the Han dynasty, the Silk Road was of great importance not only for trade and commerce, but also for the intermingling of people and ideas.

A critical question can be asked, however, whether an exaggerated focus on trade of commodities, and related to that, an excessive emphasis on the role of the Silk Road, may result in the neglect of intellectual influences—in religion, science, mathematics, art, and architecture—that were not dependent on trade. If trade is a big influence in getting people to take an interest in one another, as David Hume famously noted, so is the sheer pursuit of human curiosity, as Hume also observed. The “Nalanda trail” is, in this sense, a kind of rival to the Silk Road. The rightly admired exhibition at New York’s Metropolitan Museum during 2012–2013, called “Buddhism Along the Silk Road, 5th–8th Century,” merged the two; but the disparate elements in the two types of routes in that grand history can be usefully distinguished.³

Unlike Yi Jing, who journeyed to Nalanda by sea in the seventh century, Xuan Zang came, in the same century, on the land route, which coincided in some parts with the Silk Road (even though Nalanda is quite far away from that route). But what motivated Xuan Zang—no less than Yi Jing—to undertake that long voyage (and to spend a decade in Nalanda) was his huge curiosity about Buddhism, Buddhist enlightenment, and the subjects taught at Nalanda, in all of which the influence of trade and material pursuit was minimal.

Knowledge of arts, culture, mathematics, science, and engineering, along with religious and ethical reason-

ing, has moved people across regions for thousands of years. In our divisive world today, the need for nonbusiness and nonconfrontational encounters is extremely strong, and here Nalanda has an important vision to offer.

6.

It is not hard to see how profoundly the intellectual commitment reflected in the pursuit of the Nalanda Trail was inspired by Gautama Buddha’s emphasis on enlightenment without borders—for all people, irrespective of caste, class, and nationality.⁴ The issue of the spread of knowledge was raised in a conversation in the seventh century when Xuan Zang completed his studies and was considering going back to China. The professors at Nalanda asked Xuan Zang to stay on as a member of the faculty. He turned them down, observing that Buddha had taught the world not to enjoy enlightenment by oneself. If one learns something, it is one’s duty to share it with others, and therefore Xuan Zang believed he must go home to do just that. (He was in fact very warmly welcomed back in China.)

Indeed, it can be argued that the vast sweep of Buddhist enlightenment across China, Japan, Korea, Thailand, and much of East Asia was so successful because it was not just an imposition of foreign ideas, but was mainly based on cultural interests and intel-

⁴I have tried to discuss related issues in my essay “The Contemporary Relevance of Buddha,” *Ethics and International Affairs*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (2014).

lectual engagement.⁵ Buddha himself was eloquent on that subject, and yet in recent years, some Buddhist groups have been much occupied in fomenting prejudice, for example against Rohingya Muslims in Rakine in Burma. As a result of such persecution, and the violations of human rights by the militarist government, there has been a huge flight of Muslim refugees seeking a new home. Some formally Buddhist institutions badly need to learn from Buddha’s advocacy of reasoning and dialogue instead of confrontation and violence.

The town of Rajgir where the campus of the new Nalanda is being built is exactly where the first “Buddhist Council” met two and half thousand years ago, not long after Buddha’s death, “to resolve differences by discussion,” including divergent views on religious beliefs and social practice. A later Buddhist council, the third, was very large and met in Pataliputra (now Patna) at the invitation of Emperor Ashoka in the third century BC. It was the most famous of these councils, but the approach of resolving difference through discussion had been already established three hundred years earlier in Rajgir.

Nalanda has thus been revived near the site of the very first attempt at what John Stuart Mill and Walter Bagehot would celebrate in the nineteenth century as “government by discussion.” The powerful vision behind Nalanda is important for India, for Asia, and for the rest of the world. It must be free of authoritarian and sectarian pressures. □

⁵On this subject, see also Dalrymple, “The Great and Beautiful Lost Kingdoms.”

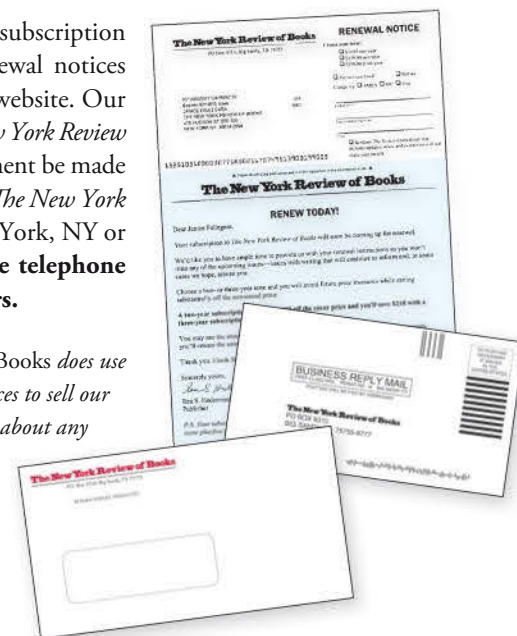
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The New York Review of Books

²For Yeo’s analysis of the things that bind Asia together and give us such strong reasons to be hopeful about its future, see *George Yeo on Bonsai, Banyan and the Tao*, with a foreword by Amartya Sen (World Scientific Publishing, 2015).

³See William Dalrymple, “The Great and Beautiful Lost Kingdoms,” *The New York Review*, May 21, 2015.

Forced into a Double Life

Ruth Franklin

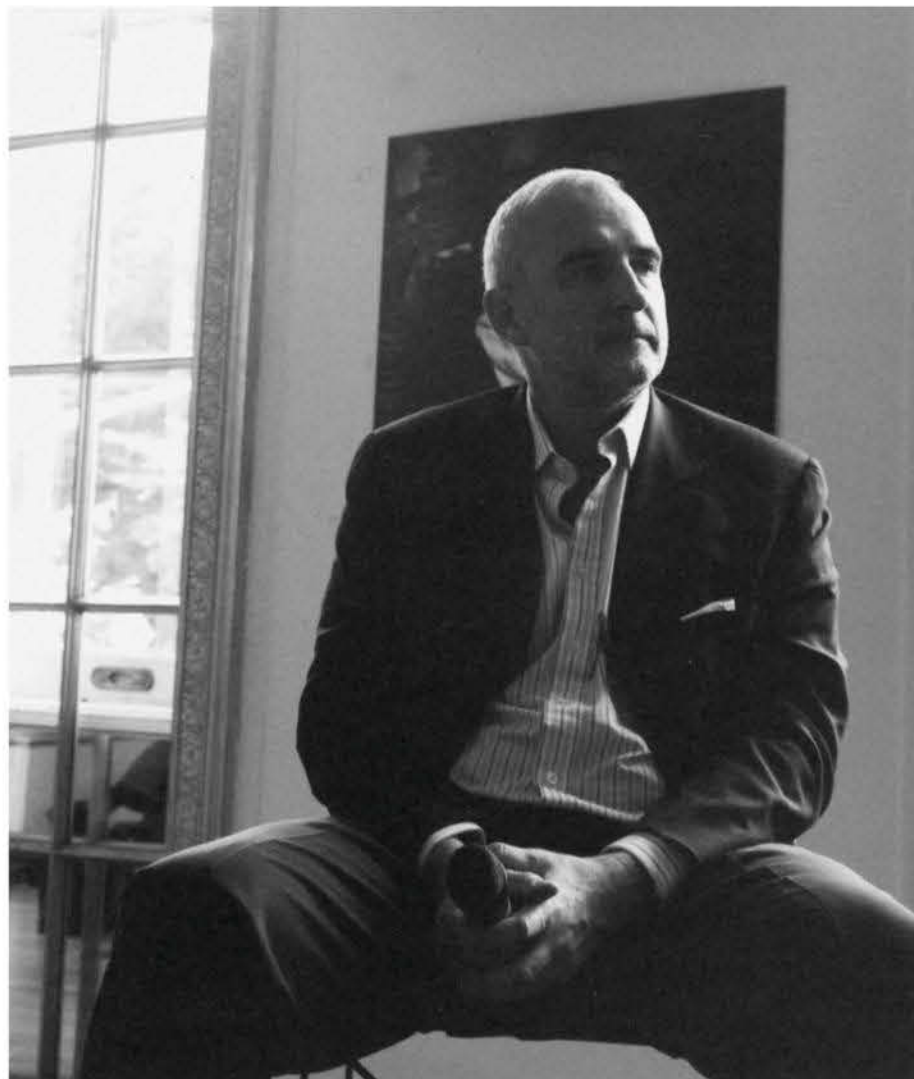
**The Girl from Human Street:
Ghosts of Memory
in a Jewish Family**
by Roger Cohen.
Knopf, 304 pp., \$27.95

In August 1945, Bert Cohen, an uncle of Roger Cohen, visited a refugee camp in Padua. Raised in South Africa, the son of immigrants from Lithuania, he had spent World War II serving with the South African army in North Africa and Italy. Among the refugees were nearly a thousand Jews liberated from Dachau. Cohen was shocked by their condition—emaciated, sleeping on a bare stone floor, scrambling for cigarettes—and by the contempt he saw in their eyes for his own prosperous state, “well dressed and well fed.” He was ashamed to feel no sympathy for these creatures “less human than animal,” he wrote in his wartime diary. “I could not feel that they were kith and kin of mine.”

Though Cohen did not know it, the refugees might not have been utter strangers to him, as his nephew reveals in his empathic and far-reaching new memoir, *The Girl from Human Street*. Starting in the summer of 1941, many of the Jews of Šiauliai, the hometown of Bert Cohen’s father, were shot en masse by Nazi troops and Lithuanian collaborators; others were forced into a ghetto. Those who survived until 1944 were marched west to Dachau. Thus a few of his father’s former neighbors could have found their way to that refugee camp in Padua. Only accidents of history protected him from their fate.

In *The Girl from Human Street*, Roger Cohen, a *New York Times* columnist whose previous books have investigated the stories of American POWs under the Nazis and the fate of four families in the former Yugoslavia, seeks to excavate the forces, both historical and personal, that shaped his own family. His story branches simultaneously inward and outward, from Cohen’s childhood in South Africa and England back to the pre-war Lithuania of his forebears and ahead to his mother’s lifelong struggle with mental illness. Part of Cohen’s aim is to fill in the unknowns: most significantly, the silence that surrounded his mother’s hospitalization, when he was a young child, for what would eventually be diagnosed as bipolar disorder. But he also comes to understand the circumstances of his family as inseparable from the larger story of the Jewish condition in the twentieth century—a story of hope and new beginnings, but also of recurrent patterns of persecution, the trauma of emigration, and the dissolution of family and community bonds.

The guiding spirit of this book is W.G. Sebald, the German writer who, in works such as *The Emigrants* and *Austerlitz*, traced the lines of exile and dislocation, of loss and forgetting, that defined the twentieth-century human condition—especially the twentieth-century Jewish condition. In Sebald’s view, which Cohen shares, human history is a series of ever-recurring patterns—the “ghosts of repetition,” as Sebald put it—that inform the course of our lives even as we remain oblivious to them. “Immigration is reinven-



Roger Cohen, New York City, 2009; photograph by Dominique Nabokov

tion,” Cohen observes, and some of the stories here are happy ones, such as his mother’s early childhood in South Africa, far from the hostile Lithuania of her ancestors.

But Cohen, like many of Sebald’s characters, is tormented by the historical ironies he finds impossible to ignore: that his parents were raised in prosperity while the Jews of Europe were murdered en masse; and that the same Jews who escaped the Holocaust by fate or luck would go on, in their adopted homelands of South Africa and Israel, to persecute those with less power—the blacks, the Palestinians. He finally perceives his mother’s bipolarity as somehow connected to the condition, as he sees it, of the contemporary Jewish people as a whole: caught between one place and another, forced to live a double life, silent about the internal contradictions that could eventually destroy a sensitive soul.

For the first waves of Jewish emigrants—including Isaac Michel, Cohen’s maternal great-grandfather, and Morris and Polly Cohen, his paternal grandparents, all from Lithuania—Johannesburg was a paradise. If they worked hard, they could achieve spectacular success. Michel cofounded the OK Bazaars, South Africa’s first large department stores, whose slogan—“You can get it at the OK”—became a national catchphrase. He arrived penniless and spent the last decade of his life as master of an estate in Johannesburg’s toniest suburb, surrounded by servants. Cohen’s parents met there, on the tennis court. Morris Cohen ran a wholesale grocery business that never

did quite well enough to make him feel entirely secure; still, he was sufficiently well-to-do upon his death for his wife to establish scholarships in his memory for needy students.

Even the landscape seemed to smile upon the family. Cohen’s father was raised in a house on Honey Street, shaded by a “peppercorn tree with a gnarled old trunk” that produced a crop in every season, the peppercorns turning from green to bright red. His mother was born on Human Street, her childhood “sun-filled...like the yellow Cape peaches, great firm golden orbs that crunched when bitten into.”

But a shadow already looms over this prosperity. “The city spreads on the surface,” Cohen writes, “because of the rich seams below it”—gold mines worked by blacks. In the Europe Cohen’s ancestors left behind, the noose of anti-Jewish persecution is tightening. Not so in South Africa, where “Jews for once were on the right side of things: they were white.” Apartheid was enacted in 1948, seven years before Cohen’s birth. In one of its ironies, whites kept blacks at a distance except in their homes; Cohen grew up surrounded by black servants. The lucky ones were treated kindly: guests who came for Sabbath meals were expected to leave a “token of appreciation” on the counter for the help. (The Sabbath observance seems to have been traditional rather than religious; the family was so assimilated that Cohen’s maternal grandfather made kreplach, a kind of dumpling, stuffed with decidedly unkosher turtle meat.) Cohen’s father, a professor of medicine, served as dean of a dormitory for black students at the University of the Witwatersrand, a

job that often involved defending them from white police. As a child brought up in close contact with blacks—the family had living quarters in the dormitory—Cohen cringed at the signs of segregation throughout the city, the beaches and benches for “Blankes” and “Nie-Blankes.”

Prejudice was common also among the Jewish community. One of Cohen’s relatives, a shopkeeper, would scatter change for black customers on a counter to which he had nailed three gold coins and laugh at their futile attempts to pick them up. Most of South Africa’s Jews, in Cohen’s view, were silently grateful that they were not the targets of the Afrikaners’ venom. “If you are busy persecuting tens of millions of blacks, you do not have much left over for tens of thousands of Jews,” he writes. For the most part, as he tells it, the Jews declined to speak up in blacks’ defense: “better just to keep *stumm*.” Some openly benefited from the regime, such as the brothers Abraham and Solomon Krok, who grew rich running a company that produced skin-whitening creams.

Cohen’s version of this story is somewhat one-sided; in fact, a relatively high proportion of South Africa’s Jews were active in the anti-apartheid movement. He presents the rabbi André Ungar, a Holocaust survivor from Hungary, as one of the few who openly condemned white supremacy, noting the unfortunate consequences: in 1956, the year after Cohen’s birth, the Interior Ministry expelled Ungar from South Africa. The Jewish Board of Deputies did not defend him; the Jewish community would not officially reject apartheid until 1985. In the meantime, about a third of South Africa’s Jews, including Cohen’s parents, left the country. But the opposition to apartheid by some of those who remained should be acknowledged.

“Perpetrator, bystander, and resister: the pattern repeats itself,” Cohen writes. He finds the racism of South Africa’s Jews bitterly ironic: Shouldn’t they have realized that the fate of the blacks mirrored the suffering of their former friends and neighbors in Eastern Europe? While his mother attended a luxurious boarding school and his father was getting his medical degree, the Jews of Lithuania were being murdered. Cohen writes:

Hockey continued, rugby was played, as Treblinka and Auschwitz and Majdanek and Chełmno and Bełżec and Sobibór and the pits of Babi Yar consumed the wretched corpses of Jews from the world my parents’ parents and grandparents had left behind.

He recognizes that their ignorance was not their fault: the fate of the Jews of Europe was still largely not discussed. Notoriously, a joint “Statement on Atrocities” issued by Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin in October 1943 did not even mention them.

The new emigrants may have wanted to forget about the Jews left behind, but the connection is too deep. After

Dominique Nabokov

Cohen's mother is diagnosed with bipolar disorder, his father draws up a family tree and places black dots next to the names of those who were known to suffer from bipolarity or depression. There are many dots, representing "a gene that formed an unbroken chain with the past, liable to resurface in any setting and at any moment."

Determined not to let these connections remain hidden, Cohen travels to Lithuania "to see what might have been." Close to eight thousand Jews in Šiauliai/Shavli, his grandfather's hometown, were killed during the war; in Žagarė/Zhager, where his grandmother Polly was born, a massacre of 2,250 Jews took place in October 1941. Not long after, SS Standartenführer Karl Jäger reported triumphantly that "our objective, to solve the Jewish problem for Lithuania, has been achieved." The last Jew remaining in Žagarė, Isaac Mendelson, died in 2011, ending a Jewish presence in the town that began in the sixteenth century.

Cohen meets with Mendelson's son, who says that his father never spoke about the massacre, in which his mother, two sisters, and a pregnant sister-in-law all died. He had escaped into Russia several months earlier, where he worked on a collective farm and later joined a Lithuanian division of the Soviet army. (The sisters of Polly Cohen, Roger's grandmother, also escaped, ending up in Rome.) Based on a survivor's account, Cohen fills in the details of the massacre, including the horrific fate of Mendelson's sister-in-law, who went into labor as she was herded into the forest to be shot and was murdered together with her baby after giving birth.

Cohen also meets a family of rescuers who saved the lives of two Jewish children by hiding them during the war. George Gordimer, born in 1938, was living with his parents and older brother in Šiauliai at the time of the Nazi invasion, and wound up in the ghetto. In November 1943, after the adults had left the ghetto for work one morning, the SS rounded up all the children. Gordimer's aunt, who had been ill and stayed home, hid him in a barrel; later Andrėjs Kalendra, a Lithuanian friend of his father's, found hiding places for him and his brother. When his parents came to find him at the end of the war, Gordimer hid from them, too: he did not recognize them. By the time Cohen meets him, late in life, he has suffered for years from bipolarity and panic attacks. "You're still stuck in the barrel," a psychiatrist tells him. Cohen is sympathetic to the view that early trauma creates an indelible scar. "Between the ages of three and eight, the brain is forming," he writes. "Connections are made, but if the psyche is under too much stress, the right connections are not established."

In *The Girl from Human Street*, it is Cohen's own trauma that he is finally investigating: the disappearance of his mother, June, into a sanatorium when he was three; her two subsequent suicide attempts; his childhood in the shadow of her unacknowledged disease. He finds consolation in tracing the disruptions that rattled her life. As a child of only seven, June was sent on her own to boarding school in England, which she despised. After her marriage to Cohen's father, they emigrated to

England for his medical work; this time she would not return. "After South Africa, my mother never got used to London's dirty-bathwater skies and the dullness seeping from them," Cohen writes. Transplanted, she withered. "Fresh soil invigorated my father. It overwhelmed my mother in the end."

Among the ordinary stresses of life in a new country is the peculiar variety of English anti-Semitism, subtle yet damaging. The pressure to keep quiet about one's Jewishness was constant. Cohen noticed, even as a child, that people's voices dropped when they said the word "Jew." (Philip Roth, in *Deception*, made the same observation.) Though Cohen placed sixth on the entrance exam for the prestigious Westminster School, he was denied the scholarship for which he qualified, because candidates had to "profess the Christian faith"—a stipulation that would not be changed until 1974. Even at home, the Cohens did not talk about their Jewishness or what it meant to them.

A psychiatrist who examined June after her first suicide attempt determined her illness to be biologically based rather than provoked by external stresses. Cohen does not subscribe to this theory. Perhaps the root cause was biological—all those dots on the family tree—but the triggers were circumstantial. June's first serious bout of depression, after the birth of Cohen's younger sister, took place only a year after her move to England as a young mother with two small children, far from her family, in a distant marriage, "an emigrant in a cold place with a cool and brilliant man." In an effort to understand what she experienced, Cohen reads Sylvia Plath's description of electroconvulsive therapy in *The Bell Jar* and travels to Surrey to scour the records of the sanatorium, where he learns that his mother's therapy began on July 30, 1958, a few days before his third birthday: "At least I now know where she was." This, too, was never spoken of at home. Cohen did not learn about her hospitalization until sixteen years later, when his grandfather, visiting from South Africa, accidentally let it slip.

The pattern of bipolarity repeated inexorably. June's first suicide attempt followed a period of mania during which she had sold the family's long-time home and bought another. After her husband found her and had her stomach pumped—"she had taken large doses of Doxepin and Valium," Cohen writes, "washed down with... alcohol"—she tried to pretend that the incident never happened. A psychiatrist started her on lithium, which reduced the highs but was less effective on the lows. Her second suicide attempt, accompanied by a note to her husband that read "I see no end to our pain," came only six months after Cohen's father told her psychiatrist how pleased he was with her progress. "I have tried to measure the agony he went through and concluded that I do not have an adequate frame of reference," Cohen writes. Ten years later, June was diagnosed with liver and lung cancer. "As far as I'm concerned, this gives me a legitimate way out," she responded.

This archetype of twentieth-century Jewish life—of being persecuted and of persecuting, of making new homes and

leaving them, of disease both literal and metaphorical—ends, inevitably, in Israel. There Cohen goes in search of Rena, "a lovely cousin with an old family curse": another black dot on the family tree. A generation younger, her branch of the family left South Africa in the early 1970s, disgusted by apartheid. They chose Israel out of idealistic Zionism, "to be part of something bigger than themselves." Their arrival, just before the Yom Kippur War, coincided with the start of the settler movement.

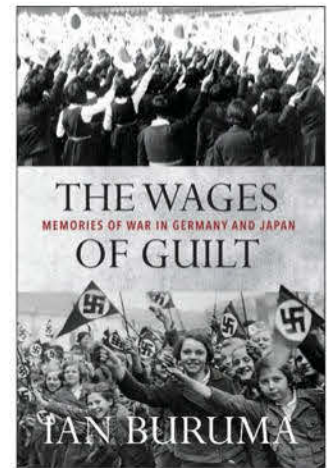
Rena's parents, Pauline and Meyer, were split by their political differences. Pauline was dismayed by the rise of settlements all around Jerusalem. Her husband took a more bellicose view: the Arab armies had attacked repeatedly and needed to accept the consequences. Anyway, "the pre-1967 borders were indefensible"—"Auschwitz borders," as the Israeli diplomat Abba Eban famously called them. The house in Jerusalem where Rena was born overlooked the disputed territory—a metaphor, as Cohen sees it, for the rift in her parents' marriage, in her psyche, in Israeli life.

As readers of his newspaper column know, Cohen is a committed Zionist. He believes that Israel, especially after the Holocaust, is essential to Jewish survival; he is sympathetic to Israel's need to defend itself; and he rejects as "inexact" the comparison of Israeli policies with apartheid. At the same time, he strongly condemns the occupation, which he presents here as dominated by messianic Zionists who pervert the movement's original meaning with their belief that the nation is divinely entitled to dominion over a Greater Israel. He is horrified by Israel's treatment of the Palestinians—an exploitation and subjugation that Jews, of all people, should reject. "No people has more ethical reason to resist the inebriation of domination than the Jews, most of whose history has involved exclusion imposed by the powerful," he argues. The fundamental contradiction of present-day Israel—its claim to be a Jewish democratic state and its simultaneous denial of rights to millions of Palestinians—tears apart Pauline and Meyer's marriage and, ultimately, Rena's life. Diagnosed as bipolar just after the second intifada begins, she commits suicide by jumping off the terrace of a popular mall in downtown Jerusalem.

Some readers may view this final tracing of the pattern as too much of a stretch. Many Israelis suffer from the contradiction between their own morality and the actions of their government, just as many emigrants uproot their lives without irreparably damaging themselves or their children. A frequent weakness of the view of history as a collage of eternally recurring patterns is that too often, elements that complicate the narrative must be omitted or distorted, because—by their very nature—they do not fit the pattern.

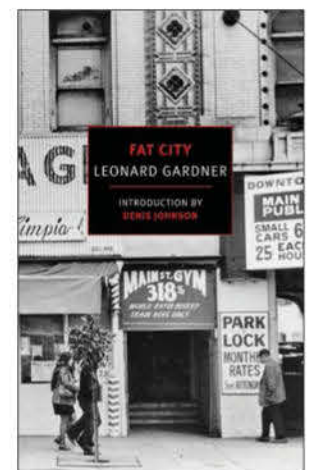
Some of this skepticism evaporates, however, beneath the force of Cohen's powerful storytelling. The imaginative empathy that he brings even to the secondary figures depicted here—especially Rena, whose story he seems to piece together from interviews with her family and friends—is sometimes breathtaking. At a cultural moment that has become notorious not only for the vast proliferation of memoirs but also for their normally unbridled narcissism, Cohen's book is written with a generosity that is truly humane. □

SEPTEMBER EVENTS WITH NYRB AUTHORS



Ian Buruma author of *The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan*
On sale September 1st

Wednesday, September 2nd, 7pm
Politics & Prose • Washington, DC



Leonard Gardner author of *Fat City*
On sale September 8th

Wednesday, September 9th, 7pm
Book Passage • Corte Madera, CA

Thursday, September 17th, 7pm
City Lights • San Francisco, CA
In conversation with Eddie Muller



Sasha Abramsky author of *The House of Twenty Thousand Books*
On sale September 1st

Wednesday, September 9th, 7:30pm
Mrs. Dalloway's Bookstore
Berkeley, CA

Thursday, September 10th, 6pm
Mechanics' Institute Library
San Francisco, CA

Wednesday, September 16th, 6pm
Avid Reader • Sacramento, CA

Thursday, September 17th, 7pm
Book Passage • Corte Madera, CA

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NEW YORK REVIEW BOOKS

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The Ironic Wisdom of Reinhold Niebuhr

Adam Kirsch

Major Works on Religion and Politics

by Reinhold Niebuhr,
edited by Elisabeth Sifton.
Library of America, 962 pp., \$40.00

This selection of Reinhold Niebuhr's work, edited by his daughter Elisabeth Sifton, is the 263rd volume in the Library of America; and it is possible that the single sentence that appears on page 705 is known to more people, and has affected them more deeply, than anything else the library has ever published:

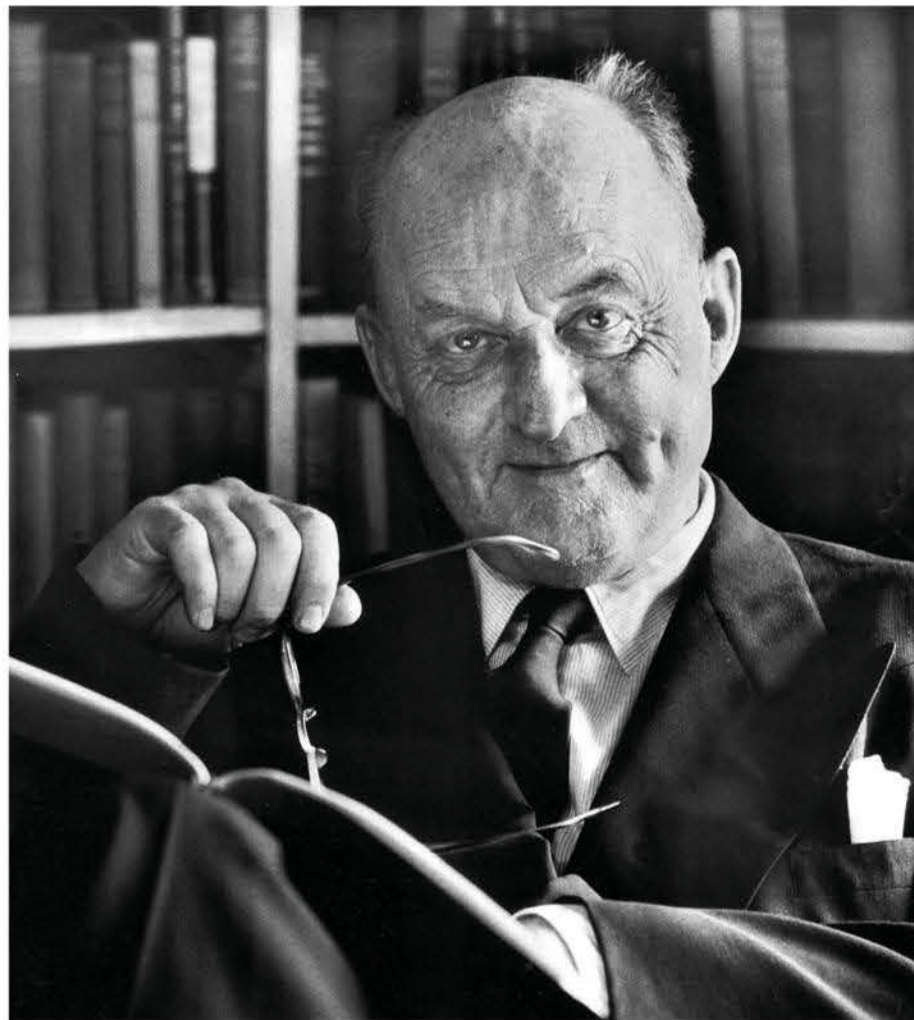
God, give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things that should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.

This is the original version of what has come to be known in many slight variations as the Serenity Prayer, under which name it can be found in millions of American homes in every medium imaginable—posters, refrigerator magnets, placemats, even tattoos (the Internet offers dozens of examples). Much of this popularity is owed to Alcoholics Anonymous, which adopted Niebuhr's prayer as an official meditation.

Surely most of the people who have turned to the Serenity Prayer in times of trouble know little about the man who wrote it. Niebuhr's achievements as an intellectual, his influential contributions to public debate from the post-World War I years through the cold war and the civil rights movement, his reputation as a liberal thinker and activist, even his status as President Obama's favorite theologian—these do nothing to cement the authority of the prayer, which stands on its own as a piece of seemingly timeless wisdom. Yet it is possible to read the whole of Niebuhr's thought through the lens of the Serenity Prayer, which is a more complicated and challenging text than it may first appear.

Despite its name, it is not a prayer for serenity alone—it could just as well be called the Courage Prayer or the Wisdom Prayer, virtues that Niebuhr sees as equally important, and indeed indispensable to the achievement of serenity. Far from being a call to resignation, or a permission slip for turning over one's problems to God, the prayer is actually an acceptance of responsibility. It is up to each individual to examine himself and the world, and to find out how much they need to be and can be changed. It is only when the limits of this change are reached that we are allowed the consolation of serenity. The Serenity Prayer is actually a prescription for a strenuous moral life.

This strenuousness, this refusal of easy religious and political answers, this insistence on responsibility in thought and action, is the hallmark of Niebuhr's thought. "An adequate religion," he wrote in a sermon, "is always an ultimate optimism which has entertained all the facts which lead to pessimism." Here, and throughout this book, Niebuhr's message is in the first instance political and social. Over the decades of his active career, Niebuhr confronted public



Reinhold Niebuhr, 1956

"facts which lead to pessimism" again and again. After World War I, the Versailles Treaty betrayed Niebuhr's trust in Woodrow Wilson's promises of a new world order. During the 1920s, as a pastor in a church in Detroit he saw how American prosperity was built on the backs of the industrial proletariat. When the Depression came, Niebuhr, like many others, saw some sort of Marxist revolution as both inevitable and justified. During the early years of World War II, he feared that American isolationism would ensure the triumph of Nazism; and during the cold war, he dreaded the threat of communism even as he warned against the arrogance of American power.

This list of topics sounds like the agenda of a pundit more than of a theologian, and it is often possible, when reading Niebuhr, to momentarily forget that we are hearing the voice not just of a public intellectual, but of a pastor. To Niebuhr himself, however, there was no contradiction between these identities. And as soon as he turns from the issues of the day to his deepest convictions about history and ethics, it becomes clear that the values we associate with Niebuhr even today—responsibility, moral complexity, a sense of human evil, hope tempered by humility—are best understood within the setting of his Christian faith. That is why the most revelatory section of the *Major Works* is the selection of sermons and prayers that follows the famous books. When Niebuhr prays, "Show us what we ought to do. Show us also what are the limits of our powers and what we cannot do," it becomes clear how the personal insight of the Serenity Prayer and the political insight of *The Irony of American History* are both underwritten by faith

in a God who can, and sometimes does, allow us to transcend our limits.

The profile of the Christian intellectual has changed greatly since Niebuhr's time. In the US, notwithstanding the pope's emphasis on the poor and the outcast, Christian politics today are often understood to be synonymous with right-wing politics, especially when it comes to social issues like abortion and gay marriage. These positions are ostensibly rooted in biblical fundamentalism, which also continues to challenge mainstream scientific understanding of evolution and even global warming. But Niebuhr's kind of liberal Protestantism inhabits a very different spiritual universe, in which Christianity is the basis not of certainties but of productive, ongoing doubts. He prefers questions to answers, and the wisdom to be gained from reading him is not a set of dogmas but a habit of mind, a way of looking at the self and the world.

The foundational doubt in Niebuhr's work is whether, and how, Christianity can be a force for justice in this world. He believed profoundly that it must, and yet he never underestimated the obstacles. First, the theological obstacles: in the gospels, Jesus preaches a radically otherworldly and self-sacrificing ethics, in which the Christian is commanded to turn the other cheek and render unto Caesar. Niebuhr was never truly attracted by this kind of passivity, perhaps because the mystical and millennial aspects of religion had so little appeal for him. A rationalist and a progressive, he tended to find in Jesus not a personal promise of redemption, but a symbol of God's

power to transform human life. Rather than saying that Jesus is God, Niebuhr preferred "to define him by saying that 'God is like Jesus.'"

As he confesses in *Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic*, his 1929 memoir of his years as a pastor in Detroit, this approach did not always win favor with more literal-minded believers. "The old gentleman was there too who wanted to know whether I believed in the deity of Jesus," he writes about one meeting of ministers in 1925. "He is in every town. He seemed to be a nice sort, but he wanted to know how I could speak for an hour on the Christian church without once mentioning the atonement."

Niebuhr nicely turns the question around, replying, "I believed in blood atonement too"—by which he meant the act performed once and for all by Jesus, when he shed his blood for the redemption of mankind—"but since I hadn't shed any of the blood of sacrifice which it demanded I felt unworthy to enlarge upon the idea." This characteristically broadens the idea of atonement from a metaphysical act into a moral act, in which all who profess Jesus must share. Throughout his work, Niebuhr rarely if ever sees Jesus as repaying the debt mankind incurred through original sin; rather, he imagines Jesus as a perpetual reminder that the debt is still owed.

By the same token, the idea that people—especially those Niebuhr calls, with biblical resonance, "the disinherited"—should sacrifice worldly hopes in the name of a heavenly reward seems to strike him as not just unfair but hopelessly naive. "Whenever religious idealism brings forth its purest fruits and places the strongest check upon selfish desire," he writes in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, "it results in policies which, from the political perspective, are quite impossible." For example, in his view pure pacifism in the face of attack by murderous dictators would make no sense.

This explains the dualism of the title of this book, his most radical statement, published in 1932 at the nadir of the Depression. It may be possible to expect a human being to be genuinely selfless and good in his or her family life and personal relationships. But it is simply not in human nature for these virtues to be translated into the larger, impersonal scale of an entire country or an entire world. "It would therefore seem better to accept a frank dualism in morals," Niebuhr concludes, which would "distinguish between what we expect of individuals and of groups," since "the moral obtuseness of human collectives makes a morality of pure disinterestedness impossible."

This hardheaded analysis leads directly to the second kind of obstacle that Niebuhr confronts, this time not theological but practical. How is the Christian minister, who in his view ought to be an activist and a goad to action, to convince his congregants that faith should be not just professed but lived? This is the central question of the *Notebook*, which is unique among

Alfred Eisenstaedt/Pix Inc./The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images

Niebuhr's books for its personal approach and avoidance of abstract arguments. In 1915, after graduating from Yale Divinity School, the twenty-three-year-old Niebuhr accepted a call from Bethel Evangelical Church in Detroit, part of the German Evangelical Synod in which he had been raised (and in which his own father had been a pastor). Over the next thirteen years, even as Niebuhr traveled extensively and earned a national reputation with his writing, Bethel was his base of operations, and it offered a fascinating window onto a city that was growing and modernizing at a breakneck pace. Niebuhr's own church grew in tandem with the city, and kept up with the times in many ways—notably, dropping German for English as the language of prayer.

Yet when it came to questions of social and racial justice—for instance, the rights of labor in Henry Ford's massive factories—Niebuhr found his public harder to move. "The new Ford car is out. The town is full of talk about it," he writes acidly in his notebook in 1927. "I have been doing a little arithmetic and have come to the conclusion that the car cost Ford workers at least fifty million in lost wages during the past year." But how to inspire his flock with a sense of righteous injustice, when they were flourishing under the status quo? "The gospel commits us to positions which require heroic devotion before they will ever be realized in life. But we are astute rather than heroic and cautious rather than courageous," he reflects, and characteristically Niebuhr includes himself in his own indictment. In 1928, about to leave Bethel for Union Theological Seminary in New York, where he would spend the rest of his career, he notes: "Here I have been preaching the gospel for thirteen years and crying, 'Woe unto you if all men speak well of you,' and yet I leave without a serious controversy in the whole thirteen years." Niebuhr took to heart the lesson that "it is almost impossible to be sane and Christian at the same time," and regretted that "on the whole I have been more sane than Christian."

By the time he came to write *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, Niebuhr had arrived at the conclusion that Christianity was proving an alibi for inaction rather than a creed of change. This explains the militantly confrontational tone of much of the book, whose primary audience and target was moderate socialists. Niebuhr had run for Congress on the Socialist ticket in 1932, but he came to believe that religious progressives believed too much in individual changes of heart, not enough in systemic transformation.

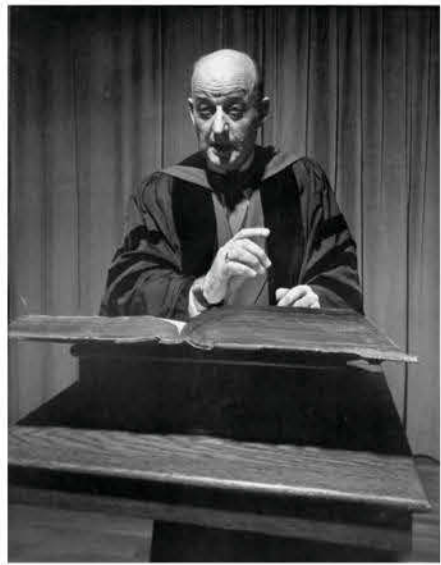
In some of the most unsettling parts of the book, Niebuhr seems to come out in favor of violent revolution. He wrote with cool relentlessness:

If a season of violence can establish a just social system and can create the possibilities of its preservation, there is no purely ethical ground upon which violence and revolution can be ruled out.

But if this ends-justify-the-means rhetoric sounds odd coming from the minister of a religion of peace, by the end of the book Niebuhr has retreated from it somewhat. In theory violence might be justified, he argues, but in practice the American proletariat has no more chance of winning a revolutionary

struggle than do American blacks. For both of these "disinherited" groups, Niebuhr concludes, confrontational nonviolence on the Gandhian model is the best course: "Non-violence is a particularly strategic instrument for an oppressed group which is hopelessly in the minority and has no possibility of developing sufficient power to set against its oppressors."

By the time Niebuhr published the next book included in the Library of America volume, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, in 1944, history had convinced him that the Marxist analysis of *Moral Man* was incorrect. Above all, the course of events in Soviet Russia had shown that communism was not in fact a cure for the problems of human society. The abolition of property, which in 1932 had seemed



Reinhold Niebuhr preaching at Union Theological Seminary, New York City, 1952

like a necessary first step toward reconstruction, now struck Niebuhr as simply another illusionary solution to the perpetual problem of human society, which was human selfishness. "There is no basis for the Marxist hope that an 'economy of abundance' will guarantee social peace; for men may fight as desperately for 'power and glory' as for bread," he observes.

At this stage, Niebuhr was still willing to group liberals and Communists together as "children of light," as against the outright barbarism of the Nazi "children of darkness." But he chastised both groups for naively believing that society could ever be made perfect. Sounding much like Isaiah Berlin or Lionel Trilling, other great liberal pluralist thinkers of the same moment, Niebuhr advocated for a modest recognition that there is no permanent solution to human difficulties: "It is an illusion of idealistic children of light to imagine that we can destroy evil merely by avowing ideals." Where Berlin rooted his conclusions in political philosophy and Trilling rooted his in literature, however, Niebuhr found support in religion, and particularly in the idea of original sin, which he called "the understanding of the Christian faith that the highest achievements of human life are infected with sinful corruption." His religious vocabulary allowed him to speak unembarrassedly about evil as a real and permanent force in human life, in a way that American liberals traditionally did not.

For Niebuhr, the failure of naive optimism about human society was not

a reason for despair or pessimism. Indeed, the typical motion of his thought is to posit a binary analysis—optimism or pessimism, light or darkness, idealism or cynicism—and then to discredit it in favor of some kind of synthesis. "The children of light must be armed with the wisdom of the children of darkness but remain free from their malice," he concludes. This approach sometimes leads Niebuhr to sound too dismissive of thinkers whom he uses as representatives of one "side," as when he breezily rebukes "the pessimism of such men as Thomas Hobbes and Martin Luther."

As his critics noted during his lifetime, Niebuhr's strength was not historical or philosophical expertise, or literary grace—his prose has many of the vices George Orwell warned against, with too many Latinate words, passive constructions, and abstractions, and a lack of striking, concrete imagery. As his biographer Richard Wightman Fox makes clear, Niebuhr wrote too much and too fast to pay attention to questions of style. (The present volume, at nearly one thousand pages, represents only a part of his output, notably omitting his most ambitious work, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, based on his Gifford lectures of 1939.)

Rather, Niebuhr's strength as a writer comes from his persistent return to the same complex of ideas and problems, even as the circumstances of his thought changed. The Marxist revolution that looked desirable to him in 1932, and still understandable in 1944, had become anathema by 1952, when he published *The Irony of American History*. By that time, the surprising resilience of American democracy had increased Niebuhr's respect for a system he once saw as doomed. The preacher who inveighed against the class system in the 1920s can now be found writing, "The prosperity of America is legendary. Our standards of living are beyond the dreams of avarice of most of the world." It was not that poverty and injustice had disappeared, but Niebuhr now saw them as remediable within a capitalist democracy:

We have managed to achieve a tolerable justice in the collective relations of industry by balancing power against power and equilibrating the various competing social forces of society.

At the same time, the spectacle of Stalin's Soviet Union had amply confirmed the danger that Niebuhr had warned against as early as *Moral Man*, that the abolition of property would simply translate power struggles into a new and even more dangerous register. Writing at the peak of anti-Communist fervor in America, Niebuhr now refers to communism as "demonic" and "satanic," and sees the cold war as a clear struggle of "freedom against tyranny." Yet *The Irony of American History*, as its title makes clear, is no paean to the country whose "side" Niebuhr unambiguously takes. Rather, under changed historical conditions, he is once again applying the lessons of his Christian liberalism, which sees the chief threat to the good precisely in its own certainty of goodness. "God and the devil may be in conflict on the scene of life and history, but a victory follows every defeat and some kind of defeat every victory," he had written as long before as 1924, in his *Notebook*. Now he set

out to remind a victorious and prosperous America of this truth.

Once again, he called on his readers to thread the needle of a binarism. On the one hand, he warned against a return to pre-war isolationism, now that an aggressive Soviet Union had taken the place of Nazism as a threat to world peace. The isolationist, he argued, succumbed to the temptation to "preserve our innocence" by abstaining from geopolitics, out of an unspoken conviction that "power cannot be wielded without guilt." On the other hand, there is the traditional American temptation to believe that the country remains radically innocent even when exercising its power, that America's good intentions mean all its actions are praiseworthy. "We are (according to our traditional theory) the most innocent nation on earth," he writes, and he does not mean this as a compliment.

For the hallmark of maturity, in nations as in individuals, is to recognize that no use of power is fully innocent, that every decision involves the sacrifice of one value to another. This does not mean that power shouldn't be used—Niebuhr has no doubt that America must defend the West against communism—but it does mean that it should be used thoughtfully and humbly. "The ironic elements in American history can be overcome," he writes,

only if American idealism comes to terms with the limits of all human striving, the fragmentariness of all human wisdom, the precariousness of all historic configurations of power, and the mixture of good and evil in all human virtue.

Exactly what this means in practice is, of course, difficult to say. Earlier this year, when President Obama made a speech comparing ISIS's barbarism to that of the Christian Crusaders of the Middle Ages, Ross Douthat of *The New York Times* identified it as a classic Niebuhrian moment, a case of power submitting to self-criticism by referring to the past behavior of one's own forebears. Better to attend to the mote in your own eye, Obama appeared to be saying, than to the beam in your neighbor's eye. This line of argument tends to support Obama's reluctance to use American power to impose order on the Middle East—an enterprise that the Iraq war revealed as a typical instance of hubristic American "innocence."

Yet it would also be possible to make a Niebuhrian argument in favor of American intervention in places like Iraq and Syria, by dwelling on the part of his message that emphasizes the responsibility of power—the need to act even if action is imperfect and has unintended consequences. (*The Irony of American History* ends by praising Lincoln, whose deeply ironic understanding of the Civil War, as advanced in the Second Inaugural, did not stop him from waging that war with overwhelming violence.) That is why so many people end up dissatisfied with the kind of liberalism Niebuhr preached: it offers no easy guide to action, nothing to relieve us of the burden of choice. Of course, that is precisely why it was the message Niebuhr thought Americans needed to hear. Reading his work today, amid our own challenges of social inequality and imperial hubris, suggests we still need it as much as ever. □

A Surprising Prime Minister

Robert O. Paxton

Léon Blum:

Prime Minister, Socialist, Zionist
by Pierre Birnbaum, translated from
the French by Arthur Goldhammer.
Yale University Press, 218 pp., \$25.00

When Léon Blum became president of the Council of Ministers of France—in effect, prime minister—on June 6, 1936, a world was turned on its head. He was the first socialist ever to occupy that position in France, and the first avowed Jew to head a major modern government anywhere (Benjamin Disraeli had converted at the age of twelve to the Church of England). Many admired his creative leadership of the Popular Front government from June 1936 until June 1937. Others reviled him almost hysterically as the embodiment of the “Judeo-Bolshevik peril.” He left no one indifferent.

Pierre Birnbaum, a French political sociologist who has written prolifically and with authority about the place of Jews in French politics and administration, along with the anti-Semitic reaction to their success, has given more attention to Blum’s Jewishness than earlier major biographers such as Joel Colton and Jean Lacouture. This is only to be expected of a volume in Yale University Press’s Jewish Lives series. But even if Blum had wished to play down his Jewishness, his enemies would not have let him. On the day that the French Chamber of Deputies voted Blum into office, Xavier Vallat, deputy from the Ardèche, rose to regret that “this old Gallo-Roman country” was going to be governed by a “subtle Talmudist.” Vallat was to become in 1941 the Vichy regime’s first commissioner for the Jewish problem (*commissaire aux questions juives*).

Blum affirmed his Jewish identity proudly whenever he felt it was scorned. Significantly, he referred to himself provocatively as a *Juif*, rather than the politer *Israélite*, the term preferred by those who thought of themselves as French citizens coincidentally of Jewish background (e.g., Proust’s Charles Swann). Born in Paris to a middling commercial family that had left Alsace in the 1840s, he was raised observant and always professed respect for Jewish traditions, though as an adult he ceased to practice most of them. Birnbaum notes that he did not have his son circumcised.

Although his three wives were Jewish, only the first marriage was celebrated in a synagogue (the third was enacted while he was under house arrest in Germany in 1943). He gratefully thanked an admirer for sending him “a lovely ham hock” when he was in a Vichy French prison. Jewishness became for him less a theological position than a commitment to social justice. It meant loyalty to a family heritage plus a set of moral values closely aligned with the universalist, rationalist progressivism of the French republican tradition. It identified Judaism closely with the legacy of the French Revolution (that had, after all, made, for the first time, citizens of the Jews living in France).

Birnbaum also shows that, unlike most assimilated French Jews, Blum supported Zionism, despite its poten-

Léon Blum



tial conflict with French assimilationist universalism. His was a “philanthropic Zionism” intended to aid the victims of pogroms elsewhere; he did not expect any French Jew to emigrate. In a rare critical passage, Birnbaum shows that Blum considered Arab-Jewish frictions a transitory matter of class conflict between Arab landlords and poor Jewish settlers whose homeland would be set “apart from other parts of Palestine.” Later, in 1948, Blum had a major part in bringing about French recognition of Israel. A kibbutz was named for him by its American founders in 1943.

Birnbaum spends less time on Blum’s socialism, but this was almost as complicated as his Jewishness. The young Léon started out as a literary critic and dandy, in touch with Proust and Gide. The Dreyfus Affair drew him into politics in the orbit of the socialist leader Jean Jaurès. At first Blum studied law and became a judge in France’s highest administrative law court, the Conseil d’Etat. During World War I he served as an administrative assistant to Marcel Sembat, a socialist politician with a seat in the war cabinet. There he acquired a taste for government. He won a seat in the Chamber of Deputies in 1919, which required him to resign his position on the Conseil d’Etat, but he retained a lawyerly view of social reform, believing that wider use of contractual relationships would help resolve French social and economic problems.

Being a French socialist, however, had almost as many rules, rituals, and

conventions as being a French Jew. The French Socialist Party remained officially committed to finishing the revolutionary project initiated in France in 1789 even longer than the German Socialist Party did (the British Labour Party was always more pragmatic). It professed goals of social revolution and the abolition of capitalism until the time of François Mitterrand, long after its actual practice had become reformist. Blum was a crucial figure in the long and hesitant transition of the French Socialist Party into a party of government.

French socialists had long refused to become ministers in a bourgeois government. A controversial exception had been made during the Dreyfus Affair, with Alexandre Millerand as minister of commerce in 1899, and again during World War I, but such departures could be justified when the Republic seemed in danger. Only in 1924, when the Cartel des Gauches (a center-left coalition) came to power, did the Socialist Party decide for the first time to vote as a group in support of a bourgeois government. Even then, socialists always voted against any and all military appropriations. When Blum accepted government responsibility for his party in 1936 he needed to explain to his militants, with his usual legal scrupulousness, that this was an “exercise of power” and not yet a “conquest” of it.

French socialism had been split in two in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution. At the party congress at Tours, in 1920, a majority, not wishing to miss the train of world revolution,

voted to join Lenin’s Third International. Blum emerged as the leader of the remainder that explicitly rejected Lenin’s requirement that the French Socialist Party purge its reformists and create a tightly centralized and actively subversive party. After Jaurès was assassinated in 1914, Blum successfully assumed his mantle as the leader of reformist parliamentary socialism in France—embodied officially in the French Section of the (Second) Workers’ International—until his death in 1950. Though officially Marxist, the otherwise widely curious Blum spent as little time with Marxist exegesis as with the minutiae of Jewish law or practice.

Birnbaum calls Blum a “state Jew,” a term of his own devising that echoes the “court Jews” of earlier centuries.¹ In this sense, Blum fulfilled his Jewishness in a career of public service to progressive causes within the French Republic. The Marxist view of the state as an instrument of capitalist domination was unthinkable for him, since he viewed the French state as a neutral agent for the public good. It has been one of Birnbaum’s contributions to scholarship to demonstrate the prominent role that French Jews took in academia and state service in France after the foundation of the Third Republic in 1875.

This contrasted conspicuously with the total exclusion of Jews from the faculties of major American universities at that time, and their limited role in the American judiciary and public administration.² There were even Jewish generals in the French army (as there were in the American army) at the very moment in 1894 when a trainee in the General Staff, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, was falsely accused of being a German spy. France was engulfed for a decade in a raging quarrel over this injustice before Dreyfus was finally exonerated. Thereupon French anti-Semites began to attack the regime itself as a “Jewish Republic.”³ Only the “national union” of World War I tempered this anti-Semitic surge.

After recovering some degree of calm and prosperity in the late 1920s, the French Third Republic faced three challenges in the 1930s that threatened its very existence. Germany revived and rearmed after January 1933 under the leadership of Adolf Hitler, determined to avenge the defeat of 1918. The world depression that began with the October 1929 stock market crash in New York affected France late, but lasted longer there than elsewhere because successive

¹Pierre Birnbaum, *The Jews of the Republic: A Political History of State Jews in France from Gambetta to Vichy*, translated by Jane Marie Todd (Stanford University Press, 1996).

²Birnbaum has explored this comparison deeply in *Les Deux Maisons: Essai sur la citoyenneté des Juifs (en France et aux Etats-Unis)* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012).

³Pierre Birnbaum, *Un Mythe politique: “La République Juive,” de Léon Blum à Pierre Mendes-France* (Paris: Fayard, 1988).

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French governments tried to cure it by austerity. Prime Minister Pierre Laval went so far in his desperate effort to balance the budget in 1935 as to cut all government expenses, local and central, by an arbitrary 10 percent, and wages and salaries of all government employees by up to 10 percent. The result was a dispiriting economic slump that exacerbated social conflict.

Thirdly, as a country that had earlier encouraged immigration to provide the workers and soldiers that its own low birth rate failed to supply, and as one traditionally hospitable to refugees, France became the destination of choice for Jews fleeing Nazi violence. France received proportionally more Jewish refugees in the 1930s than the United States, which, notoriously, declined to modify the system of national quotas it had adopted in 1922. Many French people came to believe that the refugees took jobs away from French workers, refused assimilation to French language and culture, and promoted war against Hitler. By 1936 successive centrist French governments had dealt poorly with all three problems. The Germans had reoccupied the Rhineland, the economy had shrunk, and France seemed filled with unwelcome and ungrateful foreigners.

Promising sweeping change, a new left-wing coalition, the Popular Front, won the elections of April–May 1936. The Popular Front was an ill-assorted mixture. On the conservative end stood the big center-left Radical Party. Its name was an anachronism, for its positions had ceased to be “radical” by 1900. It represented small property owners and professionals in country towns, and thus was conservative on economic issues, while still seeing itself as “left” in defense of the Republic against the Catholic Church and other enemies on the right.

At the left end of the Popular Front stood the Communist Party, now liberated by Stalin, finally alive to the Nazi threat, from its sterile opposition to the reformist left. The economic goals of the three parties were in conflict, but they were pulled together by a desire to defend the French Republic against fascism. United mainly by this political cause, they found themselves obliged to deal primarily with economic depression.

It fell to Léon Blum to head the new government, for his Socialist Party had become the largest of the three constituent parties of the Popular Front coalition. Among his problems was a belief by some French workers that the revolution was at hand. France’s largest strike wave until 1968 led to the occupation of many factories and farms, more in celebration than in anger (workers danced in the occupied premises). Terrified employers, meeting overnight in Blum’s offices in the Matignon Palace, agreed to fundamental reforms that permanently transformed French working lives: a forty-hour work week, two weeks of vacation with pay except in small shops, and the workers’ right to organize and bargain collectively with their employers. A government-regulated wheat market was intended to reverse the collapse of farm income and a 15 percent pay raise was designed to stimulate workers’ purchasing power, in contrast to previous governments’ policies of deflation and balanced budgets. Appointing the energetic reformer Jean Zay as minister

of education, Blum raised the school-leaving age from twelve to fourteen, and proposed steps to broaden access to secondary education, where the classical curriculum of the prestigious *lycées* had hitherto restricted social mobility.

The Popular Front ran out of steam, however, before these measures could get beyond the exploratory stage. Blum offered assurances that he would govern within the existing capitalist system while trying to moderate its harshness. When the Communist leader Maurice Thorez proclaimed that one must know how to terminate a strike, the “revolution” was over.

After that epoch-making beginning, the rest of Blum’s year at the head of the Popular Front government was, by almost all accounts, a failure. Economists have charged him with doing both too much and too little. The reasons for failure, however, lay partly outside Blum’s control. Humiliated by the workers dancing in their premises, the employers did everything possible to claw back their prerogatives. They applied the forty-hour week in a way that limited operations to a single shift; production fell, unemployment persisted, and deficits increased in both the budget and the balance of international payments. Since Blum felt unauthorized to impose exchange controls, French capital fled abroad while the international currency market punished the franc. Inflation returned. Breaking an earlier promise, Blum devalued the franc in October 1936, too little and too late to improve exports and reverse capital flight. In February 1937 he was obliged by poor economic conditions to declare a “pause” in his social and economic programs.

The foreign situation was even worse. On July 18, 1936, the Spanish general Francisco Franco ferried troops from Spanish Morocco to the mainland in planes lent by Mussolini, in a move to overthrow the Spanish Republic. The Spanish civil war tore the Popular Front coalition apart. Blum and the Communists wanted to help the sister republic in Madrid while the Radicals (and the British) were adamantly opposed. The ever-scrupulous Blum limited the French role to some clandestine aid and an ineffective arms blockade. When six antifascist protesters were killed by French police in March 1937, the government seemed to be devouring its own base. In June Blum resigned after the Senate rejected a measure to grant him special powers. The Popular Front coalition continued nominally to govern for a time under other prime ministers, but the experiment was over.

Blum’s time in office left some lasting legacies. His reforms of working life became the foundation of the post-war social contract in France, as did his innovations in government support for the arts and for sports. The Socialist Party, previously uninterested in the economics of repairing capitalism, began by 1938, when Blum headed another very brief government, to study Keynes. Blum also broke the socialist taboo against providing arms for military forces, and, for the first time since the early 1930s, the defense budget grew. But the Popular Front experience deepened a debilitating political polarization that had begun with the right-wing attempt to march on the Chamber of Deputies on February 6, 1934. Blum

was vilified publicly to a greater degree than any other French political leader in modern times. The virulence of invective against him from the right, and, indeed, the far left, is astonishing to read today.

With the incoherence of anti-Semitism, he was accused simultaneously of fomenting revolution and dining on golden plates. He was said to have been born somewhere in Eastern Europe with the real name of Karfunkelstein. His enemies asserted that he hated France and wanted to destroy it. The famous phrase “better Hitler than Blum” is no fiction (I once found in the German archives a report by the German consul in Luxemburg, from the fall of 1936, quoting two deputies of the Meurthe-et-Moselle department saying just that). If there was any one



Léon Blum, circa 1894

issue that united the disparate coalition of reactionaries, pacifists, and technocratic modernizers that formed around Marshal Pétain and the Vichy regime after June 1940, it was a desire to get revenge for the “Popujew Front.”

Blum was in physical danger after the German victory over France in June 1940. He had already been beaten in the street by a right-wing crowd in February 1936, and Charles Maurras had been sentenced to four months in prison for publicly advocating Blum’s murder in his newspaper *Action française*. Vichy arrested Blum and put him on trial for causing the defeat of France, but he defended himself so ably that the trial was adjourned *sine die*. In 1943 the Germans took him from his Vichy prison and interned him in a hunting lodge adjacent to the Buchenwald concentration camp, though he remained totally ignorant of conditions inside. As the Allied armies approached, he was moved to Dachau and then south through Austria, and was liberated only in May 1945.

Léon Blum has been an attractive subject for biographers. Warm, sociable, articulate, he excelled in three demanding careers. Birnbaum says relatively little about his work as a literary critic, but he was part of the brilliant assimilated Jewish intelligentsia of the turn of the century. The book’s frontispiece photo of this willowy youth (see illustration on this page) makes it hard to envision the decisive and courageous leader he became thirty years later. As a politician this refined intellectual seems incongruous as the much-appreciated representative

of small-holding winegrowers around Narbonne, in southern France. Blum had indeed first represented a Paris district, but the Communists evicted him from that seat in 1928 by maintaining their candidate in a run-off, splitting the left vote much as Ralph Nader was to do in the US in 2000.

Birnbaum’s biography thus follows many others. It is the most concise of the authoritative biographies (sometimes too much so for readers not fully familiar with the background, but he worked within a constricting page limit). It also makes clearer than the others how fully Blum assumed his Jewish identity, though in a rationalist, universalist, and civic form that was essentially secular. Finally, Birnbaum’s biography is the most personal so far, a “portrait.” The willowy youth turned out to be physically courageous (he fought a duel in 1912), and powerfully attracted to women. Birnbaum reveals more than any other biographer about Blum’s marriages and extramarital affairs, drawing upon his private correspondence.

These letters have a curious history of their own. The Nazis seized them when they stripped Blum’s Paris apartment during the occupation. The Russians found the Blum archive in Berlin in 1945 and took it home to Moscow as war booty, along with additional French archives seized by the Nazis. The entire trove was returned to France for what is rumored to have been a considerable payment only in the 1990s. Birnbaum’s unrivaled knowledge of French politics, French Judaism, and French anti-Semitism make his book a totally reliable and highly readable introduction to a rich life.

Despite his verbal commitment to an eventual socialist revolution that he probably always meant to be peacefully incremental, Blum’s most direct inspiration was Roosevelt’s New Deal (similarly attacked at home as the “Jew Deal”). American Ambassador William C. Bullitt reported to FDR on November 8, 1936, that Blum had come in person to congratulate the president on his reelection, declaring that it strengthened his own effort to “do what you have done in America.” Bullitt described the French prime minister bounding up the embassy steps, tossing his habitual broad-brimmed black hat to a butler, and kissing the ambassador’s cheeks. Bullitt called it “as genuine an outpouring of enthusiasm as I have ever heard.”⁴ A Blum–Roosevelt comparison cannot be taken far, however. Roosevelt had decisive advantages: election to a full four-year term; firm support from a majority in Congress; a lower level of internal protest; and peace on his doorstep, at least at the beginning. Finally the American economy was large enough to take its own steps without fatal international retaliation.

Readers today may well perceive more parallels with a more recent American president elected in euphoria but struggling afterward to govern amid political polarization, whose exotic name and allegedly foreign birthplace and supposed lack of American patriotism are constant themes in the conservative media. Blum may have been the French Obama rather than the French Roosevelt. □

⁴Joel Colton, *Léon Blum: Humanist in Politics* (Knopf, 1966), p. 161n.

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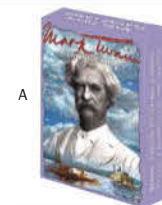
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Inspiration and Obsession in Life and Literature

Joyce Carol Oates

*Why did I write? What sin to me
unknown
Dipt me in Ink, my Parents', or
my own?*

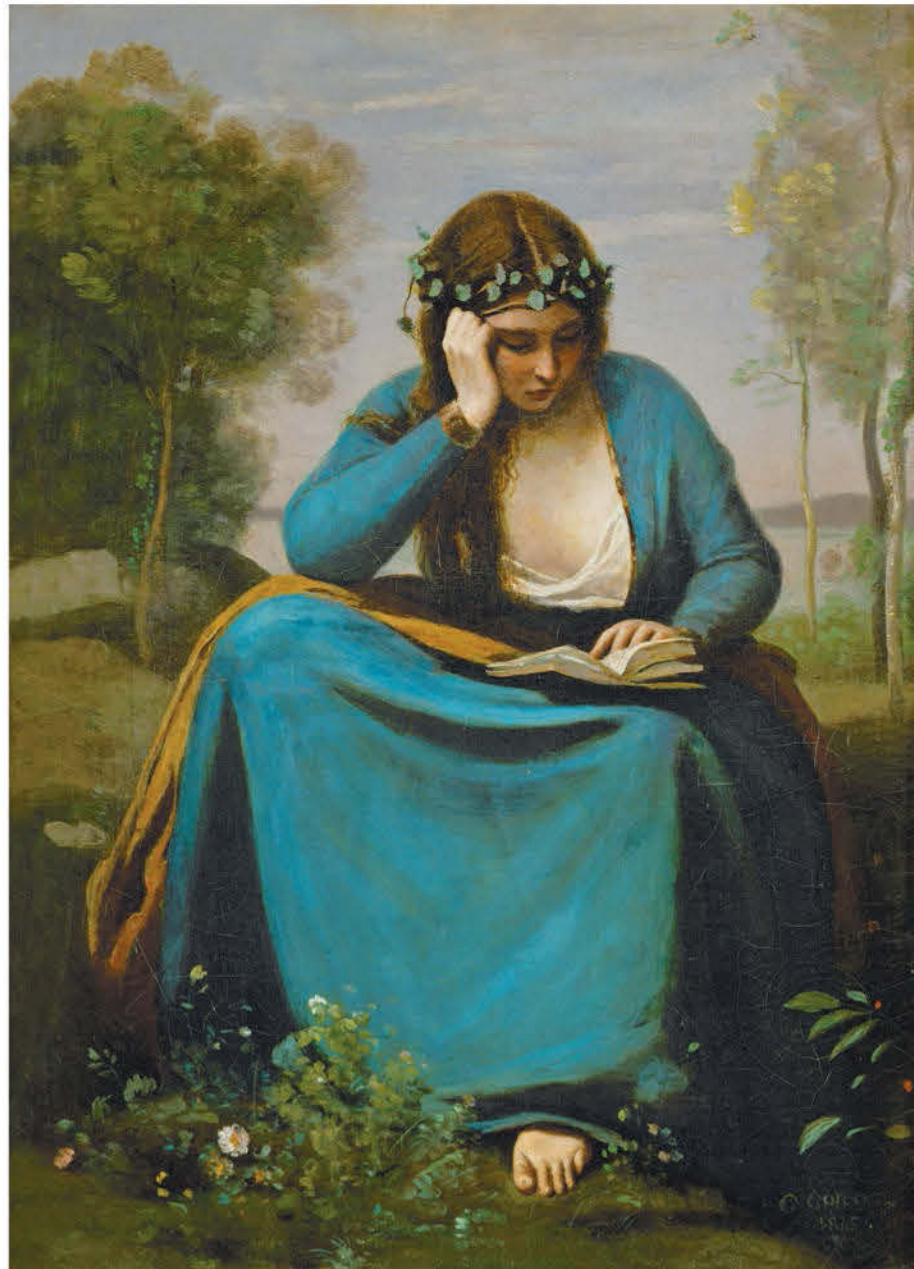
Alexander Pope's great "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot" (1735) asks this question both playfully and seriously. Why did the child Pope take to verse at so young an age, telling us, as many a poet might tell us, with the kind of modesty that enormous self-confidence can generate, "I lisp'd in Numbers, for the Numbers came," by which the poet means an intuitive, instinctive, "inborn" sense of scansion and rhyme for which some individuals have the equivalent of "perfect pitch" in music: you are born with it, or you are not.

For sheer virtuosity in verse, Pope is one of the great masters of the language; his brilliantly orchestrated couplets lend themselves ideally to the expression of "wit" (usually caustic, in the service of the poet's satiric mission). The predilection to "lisp in numbers" suggests a kind of entrapment, though Pope doesn't suggest this; the perfectly executed couplet with its locked-together rhymes is a tic-like mannerism not unlike punning, to which some individuals succumb involuntarily ("pathological punning" is a symptom of frontal lobe syndrome, a neurological deficit caused by injury or illness) even as others react with revulsion and alarm.

Pope's predilection for "lispering in numbers" seems to us closely bound up with his era, and his talent a talent of the era, which revered the tight-knit grimace of satire and the very sort of expository and didactic poetry from which, half a century later, Wordsworth and Coleridge would seek to free the poet. Pope never suggests, however, that the content of poetry is in any way inherited, like the genetic propensity for scansion and rhyme; he would not have concurred (who, among the poets, and among most of us, would so concur?) with Plato's churlish view of poetry as inspired not from within the individual poet's imagination but from an essentially supranatural, daimonic source.

To Plato, poetry had to be under the authority of the state, in the service of the (mythical, generic) Good; that it might be "imitative" of any specific object was to its discredit. "No ideas but in things," the rallying cry of William Carlos Williams in the twentieth century, would have been anathema to the essentialist Plato, like emotion itself, or worse yet, "passion." Thus, all "imitative" poetry, especially the "tragic poetry" of Homer, should be banished from the Republic, as it is "deceptive," "magical," and "insincere." With the plodding quasi logic of a right-wing politician, Plato's Socrates dares to say, in the *Ion*:

In fact all the good poets who make epic poems [like Homer] use no art at all, but they are inspired and possessed when they utter all these beautiful poems, and so are the good lyric poets; these are not



Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot: The Reader Crowned with Flowers (Virgil's Muse), 1845

in their *right mind* [italics mine] when they make their beautiful songs. . . . As soon as they mount on their harmony and rhythm, they become frantic and possessed. . . . For the poet is an airy thing, a winged and a holy thing; he cannot make poetry until he becomes inspired and goes out of his senses and no mind is left in him. . . . Not by art, then, they make their poetry. . . . but by divine dispensation; therefore, the only poetry that each one can make is what the Muse has pushed him to make. . . . These beautiful poems are not human, not made by man, but divine and made by God: and the poets are nothing but the gods' interpreters. . . .

The poets whom Plato disdained (and feared) were analogous to our rock stars, before large and enthusiastic audiences; we can assume that it wasn't the fact that these poets were popular, as Homer was popular, to which Plato objected, but the fact that his particular heavily theologized philosophy didn't form the content of their utterances. The poet's *right mind* should be under the authority of the state—indeed each citizen's *right mind* should be a part of the hive mind of the Republic. That the

freethinking, rebellious, and unpredictable poet-type must be banished from the claustrophobic Republic is self-evident. (In one of the great ironies of history, it was to be Plato's Socrates who was banished from the state.)

The worksheets of poets as diverse as Dylan Thomas, William Butler Yeats, Elizabeth Bishop, and Philip Larkin suggest how deliberate is the poet's art, and how far from being inspired by a (mere) daimon; though it is often the poet's wish to appear spontaneous, unstudied—see Yeats's "Adam's Curse":

*We sat together at one summer's
end,
That beautiful mild woman, your
close friend,
And you and I, and talked of
poetry.
I said, "A line will take us hours
maybe;
Yet if it does not seem a moment's
thought,
Our stitching and unstitching has
been naught.
Better go down upon your
marrow-bones
And scrub a kitchen pavement, or
break stones
Like an old pauper, in all kinds of
weather;*

*For to articulate sweet sounds
together
Is to work harder than all these,
and yet
Be thought an idler by the noisy
set
Of bankers, schoolmasters, and
clergymen
The martyrs call the world."*

*And thereupon
That beautiful mild woman for
whose sake
There's many a one shall find out
all heartache
On finding that her voice is sweet
and low
Replied, "To be born woman is
to know—
Although they do not talk of it
at school—
That we must labour to be
beautiful."
I said, "It's certain there is no fine
thing
Since Adam's fall but needs much
labouring. . . ."*

Very different from the Beats' notorious admonition: "First thought, best thought."

To appear spontaneous and unresolved, even as one is highly calculated and conscious—this is the ideal. As Virginia Woolf remarked in her diary in 1925, in an aside that seems almost to prefigure her suicide in 1941 at the age of fifty-nine:

I do not any longer feel inclined to doff the cap to death. I like to go out of the room talking, with an unfinished casual sentence on my lips. . . . No leavetakings, no submission—but someone stepping out into the darkness.

"Inspiration" is an elusive term. We all want to be "inspired" if the consequence is something original and worthwhile; we would even consent to be "haunted"—"obsessed"—if the consequence were significant. For all writers dread what Emily Dickinson calls "Zero at the Bone"—the dead zone from which inspiration has fled.

What does it mean to be *captivated* by an image, a phrase, a mood, an emotion?

A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably.

—Ludwig Wittgenstein,
Philosophical Investigations

Most serious and productive artists are "haunted" by their material—this is the galvanizing force of their creativity, their motivation. It is not and cannot be a fully conscious or volitional "haunting"—it is something that seems to happen to us, as if from without, no matter what craft is brought to bear upon it, what myriad worksheets and note cards. Here is Emily Dickinson's *cri de coeur*: "To Whom the Morn-

Musée du Louvre, Paris/Erich Lessing/Art Resource

ings stand for Nights,/What must the
Midnights—be!”

Most of the Dickinson poems we
revere and that have lodged deeply
into us are beautifully articulated,
delicately calibrated cries from the
heart—formulations of unspeakable
things, at the point at which “poetic
inspiration” has become something
terror-filled:

*The first Day's Night had come—
And grateful that a thing
So terrible—had been endured—
I told my Soul to sing—*

*She said her Strings were snap—
Her bow—to Atoms blown—
And so to mend her—gave me
work
Until another Morn—*

*And then—a Day as huge
As Yesterdays in pairs,
Unrolled its horror in my face—
Until it blocked my eyes—*

*My Brain—begun to laugh—
I mumbled—like a fool—
And tho' 'tis Years ago—that
Day—
My Brain keeps giggling—still.*

*And Something's odd—within—
That person that I was—
And this One—do not feel the
same—
Could it be Madness—this?*

This is the very voice of inwardness,
compulsiveness, the “Soul at the White
Heat” of which Dickinson speaks in the
remarkable poem that seems almost
to deconstruct the Platonic charge of
“god”-inspiration:

*Dare you see a Soul at the White
Heat?
Then crouch within the door—
Red—is the Fire's common tint—
But when the vivid Ore
Has vanquished Flame's
conditions,
It quivers from the Forge
Without a color, but the light
Of unanointed Blaze....*

There is another Dickinson whose
inspiration is clearly more benign,
drawn from the small pleasures and
vexations of daily life, a shared and do-
mestic life in her father's house in Am-
herst, Massachusetts:

*A Rat surrendered here
A brief career of Cheer
And Fraud and Fear.*

*Of Ignominy's due
Let all addicted to
Beware.*

*The most obliging Trap
Its tendency to snap
Cannot resist—*

*Temptation is the Friend
Repugnantly resigned
At last.*

This is surely the most brilliantly
crafted poem ever written on the sub-
ject of a rat found dead in a rat trap—
in the cellar perhaps. And behind the
house:

*A narrow Fellow in the Grass
Occasionally rides—*

*You may have met Him—did you
not
His notice sudden is—*

*The Grass divides as with a
Comb—
A spotted shaft is seen—
And then it closes at your feet
And opens further on—...*

*Several of Nature's People
I know, and they know me—
I feel for them a transport
Of cordiality—*

*But never met this Fellow
Attended, or alone
Without a tighter breathing
And Zero at the Bone—*

In the tersely titled “Pig” by the con-
temporary poet Henri Cole, the (trap-
ped, doomed) animal that is the poem's
subject fuses with the poet-observer in
the way of a vivid and revelatory dream:

*Poor patient pig—trying to keep
his balance,
that's all, upright on a flatbed
ahead of me,
somewhere between Pennsylvania
and Ohio,
enjoying the wind, maybe, against
the tufts of hair
on the tops of his ears, like a Stoic
at the foot
of the gallows, or, with my eyes
heavy and glazed
from caffeine and driving, like a
soul disembarking,
its flesh probably bacon now
tipping into split
pea soup, or, more painful to me,
like a man
in his middle years struggling to
remain
vital and honest while we're all
just floating
around accidental-like on a
breeze.
What funny thoughts slide into
the head,
alone on the interstate with no
place to be.*

—Touch (2011)

(Parenthetically, I should mention that
I read this poem when I taught sev-
eral writing workshops at San Quentin
in 2011, on my first meeting with the
inmate-writers; in fact, I had to read
it twice. The students were fascinated
and moved by this poem, in which they
saw themselves all too clearly.)

In these striking poems by Dickin-
son and Cole the poet appropriates a
“natural” sighting of one of “Nature's
People.” These are not “found” poems
except in their suggestion that the po-
et's sighting has an element of accident,
one within the range of all of us—the
rat in the trap, the snake in the grass,
the pig on the flatbed being borne
along a highway to slaughter. The poet
is the seer; the poem is the act of ap-
propriation. We might wonder: Would
the poem have been written without
the sighting? Would another poem
have been written in its place, at just
that hour? Is it likely that the poet's vi-
sion is inchoate inside the imagination
and is tapped by a sighting in the world,
which triggers an emotional rapport
out of which the poem is crafted? If we
consider in such cases what the poet
has made out of the sighted object that
is, but is not, contained within the sub-
ject, we catch a glimpse of the imagi-

nation akin to a flammable substance,
into which a lighted match is dropped.

Dickinson's poems, and her letters
as well, which seem so airy and fluent,
give the impression of being dashed off;
in fact, Dickinson composed very care-
fully, sometimes keeping her character-
istically enigmatic lines and images for
years before using them in a poem or in
a letter. It is a fact that the human brain
processes only a small selection of what
the eye “sees”—so too, the poet is one
who “sees” the significant image, to be
put to powerful use in a structure of
words, while discarding all else.

This is going to be fairly short: to
have father's character done com-
plete in it; & mother's; & St. Ives;
& childhood; & all the usual things
I try to put in—life, death, &c. But
the centre is father's character,
sitting in a boat, reciting We per-
ished, each alone, while he crushes
a dying mackerel.

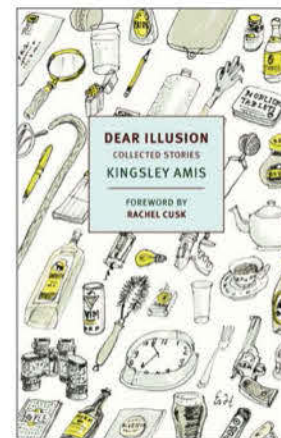
Here is Virginia Woolf musing in her
diary for May 14, 1925, on *To the Light-
house*, about which she will say, months
later, that she is being “blown like an
old flag by my novel.... I live entirely
in it, & come to the surface rather ob-
scurely & am often unable to think....”

Woolf suggests the power of a dif-
ferent sort of inspiration, the sheerly
autobiographical—the work created
out of intimacy with one's own life and
experience. Yet here also the approp-
riative strategy is highly selective, as
in memoir; the writer must dismiss all
but a small fraction of the overwhelm-
ing bounty of available material. What
is required, beyond memory, is a per-
spective on one's own past that is both
a child's and an adult's, constituting an
entirely new perspective. So the writer
of autobiographical fiction is a time
traveler in his or her life and the writ-
ing is often, as Woolf noted, “fertile”
and “fluent”:

I am now writing as fast & freely
as I have written in the whole of
my life; more so—20 times more
so—than any novel yet. I think this
is the proof that I was on the right
path: and that what fruit hangs in
my soul is to be reached there....
The truth is, one can't write di-
rectly about the soul. Looked at,
it vanishes: but look [elsewhere],
& the soul slips in.

John Updike's first novel, *The Poor-
house Fair* (1959), published when the
author was twenty-six, is a purposefully
modest work composed in a minor key;
unlike Norman Mailer's first novel,
The Naked and the Dead (1948), also
published when the author was twenty-
six. Where Mailer trod onto the literary
scene like an invading army, with an
ambitious military plan, Updike seems
almost to have wished to enter by a
rear door, claiming a very small turf in
rural eastern Pennsylvania and concen-
trating upon the near-at-hand with the
meticulous eye of a poet.

The Poorhouse Fair is in its way a bold
avoidance of the quasi-autobiographical
novel so common to young writers: the
bildungsroman of which the author's
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and lacking the dramatic features of



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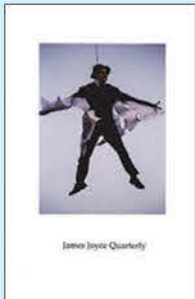
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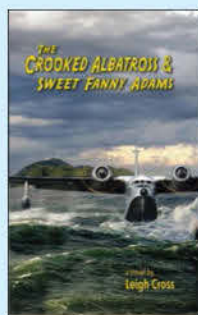
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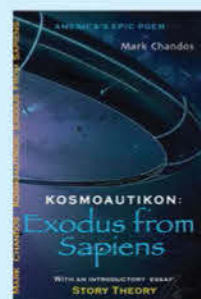
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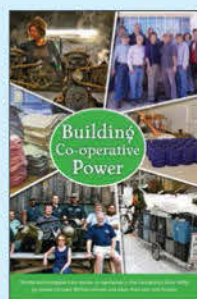
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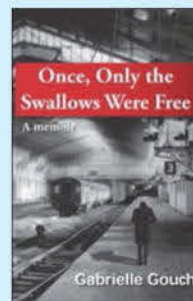
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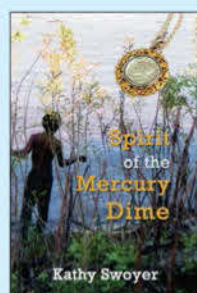
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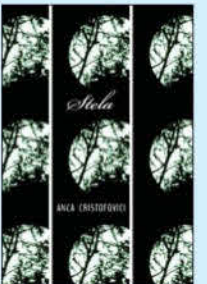
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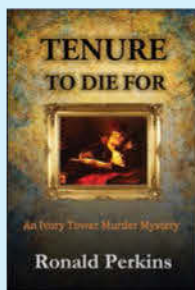
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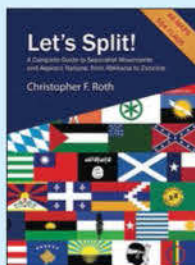
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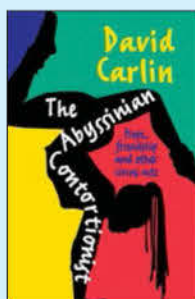
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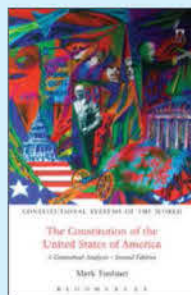
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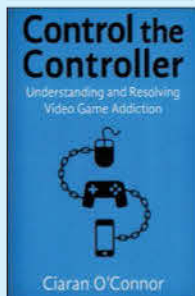
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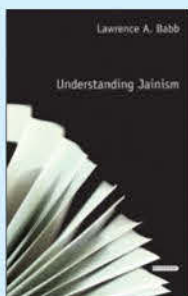
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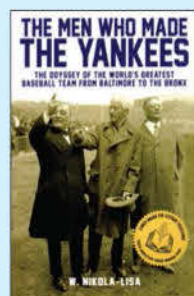
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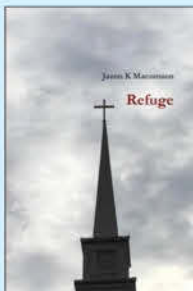
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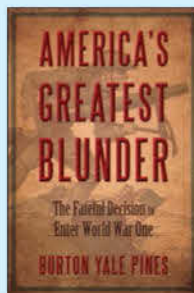
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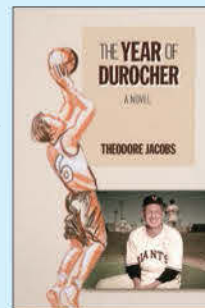
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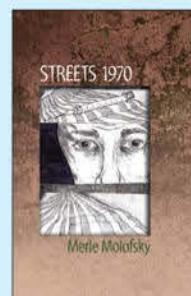
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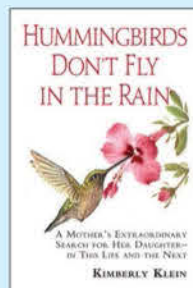
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the typical future, dystopian work; its concerns are intrapersonal and theological. By 1959 Updike had already published many of the short stories that would be gathered into *Olinger Stories*, which constituted in effect a bildungsroman, freeing him to imagine an entirely other, original debut work.

The Poorhouse Fair, as Updike was to explain in an introduction to the 1977 edition of the novel, was suggested by a visit, in 1957, to his hometown, Shilington, which included a visit to the ruins of a poorhouse near his home. The young author then decided to write a novel in celebration of the fairs held at the poorhouse during his childhood, with the intention of paying tribute to his recently deceased maternal grandfather, John Hoyer, given the name "John Hook" in the novel. In this way *The Poorhouse Fair* both is not, and is, an autobiographical work, as its theological concerns, described elsewhere in Updike's work, were those of the young writer at the time.

Appropriately, Updike wrote another novel set in the future near the end of his life, *Toward the End of Time* (1997), in which the elderly protagonist and his wife appear to be thinly, even ironically disguised portraits, or caricatures, of Updike and his wife in a vaguely postapocalyptic world bearing a close resemblance to the Updikes' suburban milieu in Beverly Farms, Massachusetts. Is it coincidental that Updike's first novel and his near-to-last so mirror each other? Both have theological concerns, and both are executed with the beautifully wrought, precise prose for which Updike is acclaimed; but no one could mistake *Toward the End of Time*, with its bitter self-chiding humor and tragically diminished perspectives, for a work of fiction by a reverent and hopeful young writer.

James Joyce once remarked that *Ulysses* was for him essentially a way of capturing the speech of his father and his father's friends—an astonishing statement when you consider the complexity of *Ulysses*, but one that any writer can understand. So much of literature springs from a wish to assuage homesickness, a desire to commemorate places, people, childhoods, family and tribal rituals, ways of life—surely the primary inspiration of all: the wish, in some artists clearly the necessity, to capture in the quasi permanence of art that which is perishable in life. Though the great modernists—Joyce, Proust, Yeats, Lawrence, Woolf, Faulkner—were revolutionaries in technique, their subjects were intimately bound up with their own lives and their own regions; the modernist is one who is likely to use his intimate life as material for his art, shaping the ordinary into the extraordinary.

The confessional poets—Robert Lowell, John Berryman, W.D. Snodgrass, Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, to a degree Elizabeth Bishop—rendered their lives as art, as if self-hypnotized. Of our contemporaries, writers as seemingly diverse as Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, and John Updike created distinguished careers out of their lives, often returning to familiar subjects, lovingly and tirelessly reimagining their own pasts as if mesmerized by the wonder of "self." In his last, most obsessively self-reflective work, *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle*, Vladimir Nabokov evokes the intense claustrophobia of a "super-imperial couple"

who not only inhabit the same psychic realm but, boldly and audaciously, are intimately related: sister and brother. Set in a whimsical counterworld, "Antiterra," Nabokov's commemoration of self is finally, and literally, incestuous.

No writer has been more mesmerized by the circumstances of his own, exceptional life than our greatest Transcendentalist poet, Henry David Thoreau, who wrote exclusively, obsessively of his "self" as an adventurer in a circumscribed world—"I have traveled much in Concord," he famously said. *Walden* is the publicly revered text but it is Thoreau's *Journal*, in which he wrote daily from 1837 to 1861, eventually accumulating some seven thousand pages, that is the more remarkable document, as Thoreau is the most acute of observers of nature and of human nature; an analyst of his "self" in the Whitmanesque sense, the "self" that is all selves, the transcendent universal. Here is the essential Thoreau, in the essay "Ktaadn and the Maine Woods":

I stand in awe of my body, this matter to which I am bound has become so strange to me. I fear not spirits, ghosts, of which I am one...but I fear bodies.... Talk of mysteries!—Think of our life in nature,—daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with it,—rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! the *solid earth!* the *actual world!* the *common sense!* *Contact! Contact! Who are we? where are we?*

The early Surrealists considered the world a vast "forest of signs" to be interpreted by the individual artist. Beneath its apparent disorder the visual world contains messages and symbols—like a dream? Is the world a collective dream? Not the hypnotic spell of the individual artist's childhood, family, regional life (as in the inspiration of commemoration) but rather its antithesis, the impersonal, the chance, the "found." The Surrealist photographer Man Ray wandered Parisian streets with his camera, anticipating nothing and leaving himself open to *disponibilité*, or availability and chance. The most striking Surrealist images were ordinary images made strange by being decontextualized—"Beautiful as the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table" (André Breton appropriating metaphor of Lautréamont).

When photography began to be an art that didn't depend upon careful staging in a studio, or even outdoors, it was discovered to be ideally suited to the caprices of opportunity; the artist wanders into the world, armed with just his camera, freed from the confines of the predictable and the controlled, as in the work of Henri Cartier-Bresson, Weegee, Bruce Davidson, Garry Winogrand, the newly discovered Vivian Maier, Diane Arbus (whose strategy was "to go where I've never been"), and numerous others.

Literature is not a medium that lends itself well to the Surrealist adventure of *disponibilité*. Even radically experimental fiction requires some strategy of causation, otherwise readers won't trouble to turn pages. Unlike most visual art, which can be experienced in a single gaze, fiction is a matter of subsequent and successive gazes, mimicking chronological time, as it is locked into chronological time. (A variation on this is William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* with its "cut-up" method of a discontinuous and disjointed narrative appropriate to a drug-addled consciousness, for whom hallucination is more natural than coherence.)

There is a very minor tradition of "found poems" discovered in unpo-

More often found poetry is meant to be satirical or witty, or mordantly ironic, as in Hart Seely's appropriated material titled *Pieces of Intelligence: The Existential Poetry of Donald H. Rumsfeld* (2003). Here is a complete poem by Rumsfeld/Seely:

THE UNKNOWN

As we know,
There are known knowns.
There are things we know
we know.
We also know
There are known unknowns.
That is to say
We know there are some things
We do not know.

But there are also
unknown unknowns,
The ones we don't know
we don't know.

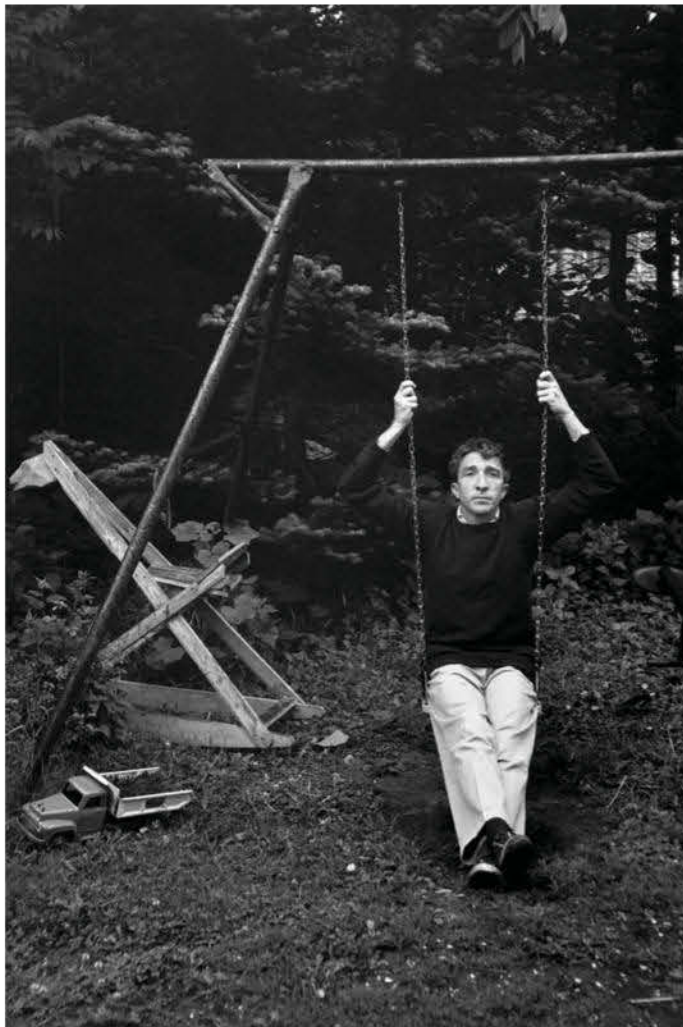
If inspiration is many-faceted, out of what human need—or hunger—does inspiration spring? That's to say, what is the motive for metaphor?

It seems clear that *Homo sapiens* is the only species to have anything like language, and certainly the only species to have written languages, "histories." Our sense of ourselves is based upon linguistic constructs, inherited or remembered, and regarded as precious or at least valuable; our sacred texts are presumed to have been dictated by gods, and sometimes we are fired with murderous rage if these texts are challenged or mocked, or if our creator's name is uttered in the wrong way, or by the wrong lips. Perhaps literature in its broader sense, incorporating centuries, millennia, as a consequence of myriad individual inspirations across myriad cultures, relates to us as that part of the human

brain called the hippocampus relates to memory.

The hippocampus is a small, seahorse-shaped part of the brain necessary for long-term storage of factual and experiential memory, though it is not the site of such storage. Short-term memory is transient, long-term memory can prevail for many decades: the last thing you will be able to retrieve in your memory may well be the first thing that came to reside there—a glimpse of your young mother's face, a confused blur of a childhood room, a lullaby, a caressing voice. If the hippocampus is injured or atrophied, there will be no further storage of memory in the brain—there will be no new memory. I have come to think that art is the formal commemoration of life in its variety—the novel, for instance, is "historic" in its embodiment in a specific place and time, and its suggestion that there is meaning to our actions. It is virtually impossible to create art without an inherent meaning, even if that meaning is presented as mysterious and unknowable.

Without the stillness, thoughtfulness, and depths of art, and without the ceaseless moral rigors of art, we would



John Updike, Ipswich, Massachusetts, 1962

etic places like newspapers, magazines, advertisements, graffiti, instruction manuals, and brochures. Virtually all poets have experimented with "found poems" at some point in their careers, sometimes appropriating entire passages of prose into a poem, more often appropriating a few lines and constructing a poem around these lines, as in work by Howard Nemerov, Charles Olson, Blaise Cendrars, and Charles Reznikoff among others. A "found poem" gem is Annie Dillard's appropriation of a manual titled *Prehospital Emergency Care and Crisis Intervention* (1989), which the poet has fashioned into a suite of short poems titled "Emergencies."

ANSWER

If death is imminent either
On the scene or in the ambulance,
Be supportive and reassuring
To the patient, but do not lie.

If a patient asks, "I'm dying,
Aren't I?" respond
With something like, "You
Have some very serious injuries,
But I'm not giving up on you."

have no shared culture—no collective memory. As if memory were destroyed in the human brain, our identities corrode, and we “were” no one—we become merely a shifting succession of impressions attached to no fixed source. As it is, in contemporary societ-

LETTERS

THE BUGGED CLASSROOM

To the Editors:

Readers of David Bromwich’s excellent article “Trapped in the Virtual Classroom” [NYR, July 9] that contrasts an online with a physical-space classroom need to think about an additional issue that so far is not receiving much, if any, notice. The online classroom, by virtue of its digital medium, is a surveilled classroom. Teachers and students both will have no privacy there. Because backup is permanent (and many efforts to individualize instruction and provide feedback depend upon the ability to mine the data generated), it will be risky for both faculty and students to explore the outer reaches of ideas, speculate on consequences, examine uncommon or dissident ideas or those subject to intellectual property constraints.

When data and information are confused with knowledge, the mere presence of certain keywords or copyrighted strings will, to the literal-minded, add up to the presence of something suspicious. This is a contagion theory of mental life—that exposure equals adoption. It is one thing to have a talking head broadcasting from the front of the room and quite another to probe ideas for their strengths and weaknesses through a dynamic process. Even dumb ideas may need to be considered to arrive at a more nuanced conclusion but no surveillance system is able to understand this. Who knows who will be looking at what data in the future, drawing unacceptable inferences about political attitudes, loyalty, or professional development?

Neither teachers nor students in such a classroom should feel free to take any intellectual risks in it. We will all be the losers.

Christina Spiesel
New Haven, Connecticut

David Bromwich replies:

I am grateful to Christina Spiesel for bringing out a constraint that arises from the nature of the virtual classroom—a hidden disadvantage in the regime of “openness” that I haven’t seen mentioned elsewhere. All proceedings online are surveilled, and are backed up on a permanent record. This fact alone suggests a host of moral and legal questions that have evaded public discussion; but I would join Spiesel in emphasizing a less obvious drawback. Intellectual argument under surveillance isn’t likely to exhibit the free-wheeling quality of an actual classroom. “He who knows only his own side of the case, knows little of that,” wrote Mill in *On Liberty*. “He must be able to hear [opposing arguments] from persons who actually believe them; from persons who defend them in earnest, and do their very utmost for them.” I suspect the earnestness that may drive opposing judgments can never fully register when the persons “who actually believe them” are only virtually present. If we think candor is a trait of considerable social as well as intellectual value, we should take care how we modify the conditions that have made candor possible.

ies, where so much concentration is focused upon social media, insatiable in its fleeting interests, the “stillness and thoughtfulness” of a more permanent art feels threatened. As human beings we crave “meaning”—which only art can provide; but the social media prot-

LIZARDS IN THE PARK

To the Editors:

Martin Filler presents an excellent review of Antoni Gaudí the architect [“Gaudí’s Great Temple,” NYR, June, 25] but near the end of his article he throws in fantasies of Park Güell dragons and sea serpents. Gaudí apparently was a better herpetologist than Filler. Gaudí’s circa ten-foot-high lizards on the side of the Basilica Sagrada Família in Barcelona, Spain, are accurate, lifelike with no hint of dragonness. It would be a fun joke if they were wall lizards, *Lacerta muralis*, but they have more rounded heads and a distinct neck so they look to me (I crawled about the building and up and within the towers in 1967 and have photographs) like garden lizards, *Calotes calotes*.

The large multicolored lizard that greets visitors to Park Güell appears to be either a garden lizard or the North African rainbow lizard, *Agama agama*. Both lizards are common and colorful. It is a reptile as it has scales (colored tiles). It is not a crocodile as some have said (it has small scales and a round head, not a flat head). It is a lizard, but not a gecko (the toes are wrong). It is not a chameleon (the tail and toes are wrong). The head scales, body, and tail shape suggest that it is an agamid (Old World common lizard) and probably a garden or rainbow lizard the bright colors of which Gaudí has enhanced with his colored tiles.

There is no basis for calling Park Güell’s serpentine bench a sea serpent! There is little sea life seen in Gaudí art and there are no sea snakes in nearby sea and ocean waters.

Bayard H. Brattstrom
Emeritus Professor of Zoology
California State University
Fullerton, California

Martin Filler replies:

Professor Brattstrom’s illuminating letter makes me regret that I did not sign up for the Herpetology 101 course that so tempted me as an undergraduate. However, I doubt that Antoni Gaudí was much more formally versed in the scientific particulars of animal or plant biology than I was. It seems to me that what makes this architect’s extraordinary fantasies on the natural world so remarkable is his inventive imagination, rather than any strict fidelity to this or that prototype. After all, few paleontologists have objected to architectural historians’ likening the undulating roofline of Gaudí’s Casa Batlló to a dinosaur, whatever specific genus it might be thought to approximate.

NASTY IMAGES OF JEWS

To the Editors:

I would like to clarify two mistaken impressions that might arise from Eric Christiansen’s review of my book, *Dark Mirror: The Medieval Origins of Anti-Jewish Iconography* [NYR, July 9]. Professor Christiansen writes, “Jeering Jewish onlookers as in the Quentin Matsys *Ecce Homo*... we are assured, were not intended to rouse hatred of living Jews or wound their feelings.” This implies that I deny the anti-Jewish nature of such images. I do not. By 1400 art viewers would certainly identify such figures

vide no meaning, only this succession of fleeting impressions whose underlying principle may simply be to urge us to consume products.

The motive for metaphor, then, is a motive for survival as a species, as a culture, and as individuals. □

as Jewish, and see them as villainous. I do maintain that the *primary* motivation for creating religious art was not to vilify Jews, and that it is worth asking when, how, and why nasty images of Jews became so central to Christian worship.

In reference to Cruikshank’s engraving of Fagin, Professor Christiansen writes, “There is no reason to suppose that Dickens and Cruikshank were any less pure in their intentions than were the twelfth- and thirteenth-century scribes, and yet it would be a naive apologist who explained the Hebraic Fagin as merely a moral fiction...” This could lead readers to assume that because I read some medieval images of Jews as being equally critical of Christian sin, I would attribute the same ambiguity of meaning to modern anti-Jewish caricature.

By no means. In history, chronology matters. Nineteenth-century anti-Jewish caricatures were drawing on—and their viewers’ responses were shaped by—a six-hundred-year-old-tradition of portraying Jews with certain negative features, postures, and symbols. In the thirteenth century, when Jews were first depicted this way, no such tradition yet existed. Unless we assume that (1) all or most Jews looked like their caricatures, and (2) the goal of medieval artists was to accurately portray Jews—neither of which is the case—we must ask what inspired the creation of such images, and what influenced their interpretation. And most importantly, how the development of medieval anti-Jewish iconography affected the way people viewed Jews, and so helped plant the seeds of Western anti-Semitism. Those are the questions I explore in *Dark Mirror*.

Professor Christiansen expresses doubt regarding whether hats served to identify Jews in high medieval art. I would refer readers to the many contemporary Christian texts cited in my book that associate Jews with pointed hats, or to any modern handbook of medieval iconography. I am glad to fully concede the similarity of the hats of Mexican peons to those depicted on some biblical Hebrews, but I confess myself baffled as to its relevance.

Sara Lipton
Associate Professor
History Department
State University of New York
at Stony Brook
Stony Brook, New York

BLUEBEARD EX MACHINA

To the Editors:

Daniel Mendelsohn’s review of *Her and Ex Machina* [NYR, June 4] was a pleasure to read and replete with intriguing connections; the kind of article one clips and files away for future reference. However, I was surprised that, in regard to *Ex Machina*, he passed over the striking similarities, not to say inspiration, of the story of Bluebeard. The forbidden secrets, the former “wives” hanging on hooks, were straight out of the seventeenth-century French fairy tale.

And while Professor Mendelsohn provided a marvelous discussion of the long, one could almost say archetypal, anxiety that human ingenuity raises, the dynamic of the Bluebeard tale, with its suppression of woman in service to male megalomania, is certainly equally powerful, and even older. Fellini did a masterful job with this theme

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in 8 1/2, taming it with humor and even poignancy; Alex Garland's vision returns the fear and horror of the original tale.

Geoffrey Brown
Columbus, Ohio

Daniel Mendelsohn replies:

I am very grateful indeed to Geoffrey Brown for alerting readers to the important Bluebeard motif in Alex Garland's richly allusive film—and, I must say, a bit perplexed as to why I didn't mention it myself, since I find not one but three references to Bluebeard in the notes I took while watching the movie (including one referring to Nathan's "Bluebeard-like closet"!). I fear that, in my eagerness to underscore the classical provenances of the robot narrative, I overlooked the French. As the film's young Caleb might say, "My bad!"

MARX GAVE NO HAVEN

To the Editors:

In his review of Michael Walzer's *The Paradox of Liberation* [NYR, June 4], Michael Ignatieff writes that secular national liberation activists considered religion "a haven in a heartless world" as Marx so condescendingly put it." Marx did describe religion as "the heart of a heartless world" in the same famous passage where he called it "the opium of the people," but a search of his complete works reveals no instance of the "haven" formulation (whose most famous use, as the title of Christopher Lasch's 1977 book, refers to the family rather than religion).

Whether the original description of religion as "the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions" is condescending or sympathetic may be contested, as it has been by religious leftists from Alasdair MacIntyre to the liberation theologians of Latin America.

Tim Barker
Brooklyn, New York

BALFOUR AT WADDES DON

To the Editors:

James Fenton's excellent article on the treasures of Waddesdon Manor [NYR, June 25] overlooked one treasure that is unique and unexpected. During a visit there recently I was stunned to see displayed rather unobtrusively in a small glass case (with several other relatively unimportant items) the original Balfour Declaration! There it is, the letter from UK Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour to Walter Rothschild in November 1917 stating that His Majesty's Government favors and will facilitate the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people. It states also that nothing shall be done "which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities..." Another reason to visit this extraordinary house.

Roger Dee, MD, Ph.D., FRCS
Setauket, New York

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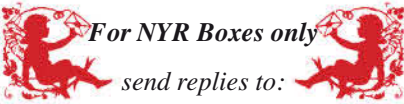
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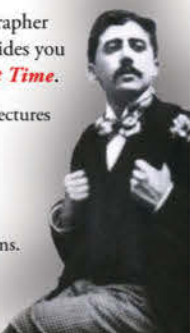
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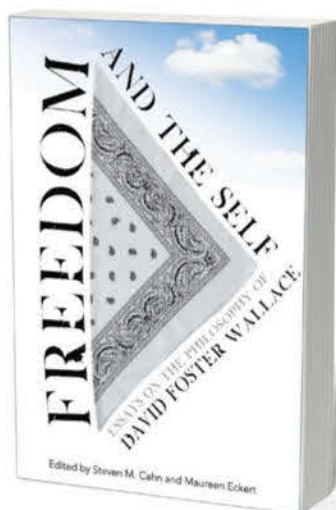
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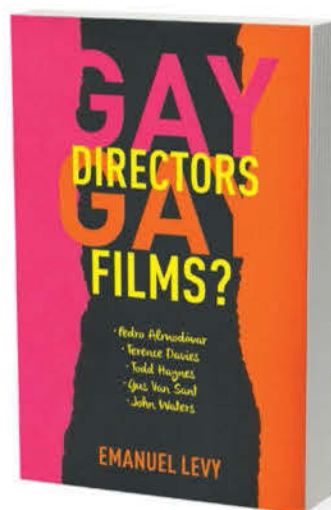
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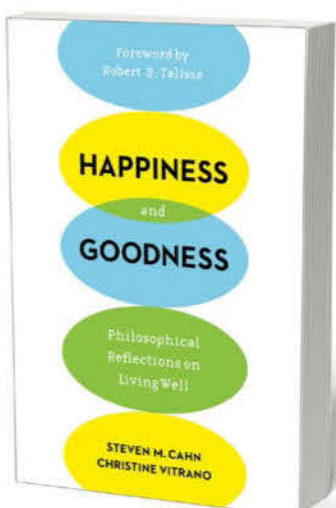
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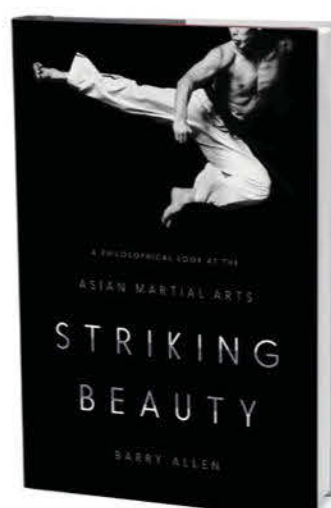
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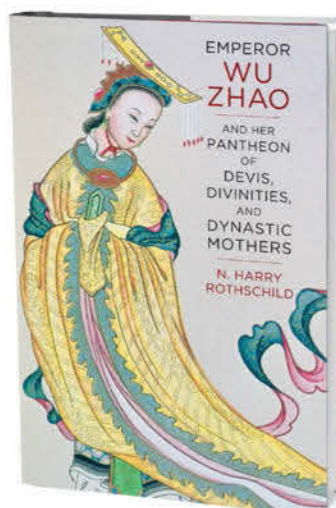
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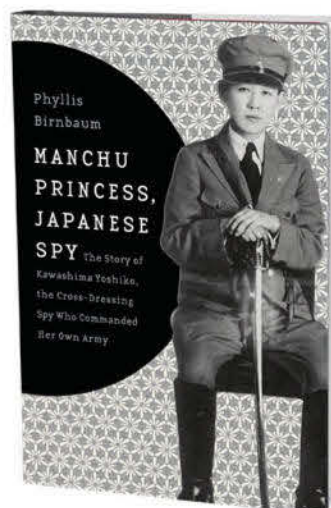


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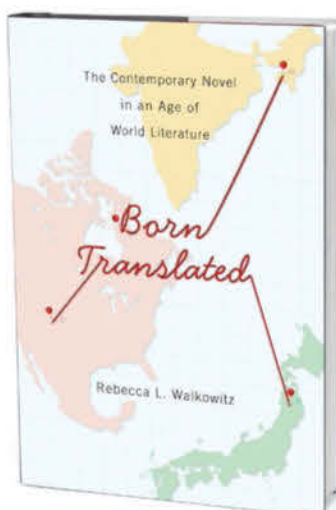
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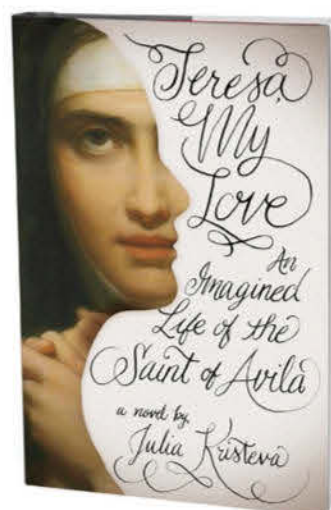
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